

School News

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Covering the Palo Alto Unified School District



Volume 6, Issue 17

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Dr. Donald B. Austin
Superintendent
of Schools

The PAUSD Promise encapsulates five strategic goals, each selected for their significant influence on our students' experiences. As we continue to navigate our educational journey, I'd like to reflect on our strides in bolstering mental health.

Mental well-being is a universal concern, touching the lives of all individuals. Often taken for granted when all is well, it becomes conspicuously critical when one's mental health wavers. Its complexity cannot be overstated; factors ranging from genetics to social connections, environmental shifts, stress, and physical well-being intertwine to shape mental health. Paths to improvement are as unique as each individual.

Our district has invested substantially in nurturing the mental health of both students and staff. Initiatives like Productive Play and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in our elementary

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schools, while seemingly unrelated, are crucial components of this holistic approach. Likewise, our arts and music programs offer invaluable spaces for creative expression and stress relief.

We've transformed our therapeutic services by bringing them in-house, placing therapists at every tier within our district, directly accessible to our students. Our staff, too, will soon benefit from Tier I supports and already have access to a dedicated mental health therapist, complemented by site outreach and ongoing professional development.

Perhaps the most profound change is the increasing openness within our community to discuss mental health issues. Everyone faces challenges at times, with some situations necessitating comprehensive strategies for support. Today, we stand better equipped than ever to address the spectrum of these needs. While our journey towards mental health excellence has no endpoint, we take pride in the progress we're making, always moving forward with purpose and commitment.

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Addison *Elementary School*

650 Addison Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301 • 650/322-5935 • addison.pausd.org



Jeff Downing
Principal

Celebrating Lifeskills

To cultivate a positive school culture at Addison, we intentionally focus on building others up and celebrating accomplishments. Lifeskills play a central role, with monthly emphasis on traits such as pride, kindness, and generosity. For January, we are highlighting courage.

At weekly assemblies, students and staff are recognized for demonstrating these skills. We give certificates to students and staff who have demonstrated that Lifeskill and been recognized by others for doing and we share a few stories.

The past week, we had a student who had broken an arm on the playground in the fall and was hesitant about getting back on the bars. They came to me and glowingly shared that they had overcome their fear and could do the bars again and invited me to see. It was such a great example of showing courage and the entire student body celebrated the success when we shared the story at our assembly.

Celebrating others not only boosts their confidence but also creates a contagious positivity felt across the community. This positivity fosters a welcoming environment where individuals feel comfortable taking risks to learn and grow. It aligns with the PAUSD Promise, guiding our school's mission.

By acknowledging diverse acts of courage, from overcoming testing anxiety to extending a friendly invitation, we demonstrate the broad spectrum of behaviors worthy of celebration. The intentional recognition of these achievements contributes to a structured culture of positivity.

This is just one example of how we use the PAUSD Promise to guide our school's mission. All five of the pillars of the Promise intertwine with one another. When we celebrate each other, we create a healthier space to learn and work in, we become more aware of others and creating equitable spaces, and we feel better about taking risk in our learning.



Barron Park *Elementary School*

800 Barron Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/858-0508 • barron.pausd.org



Dr. Judy Argumedo
Principal

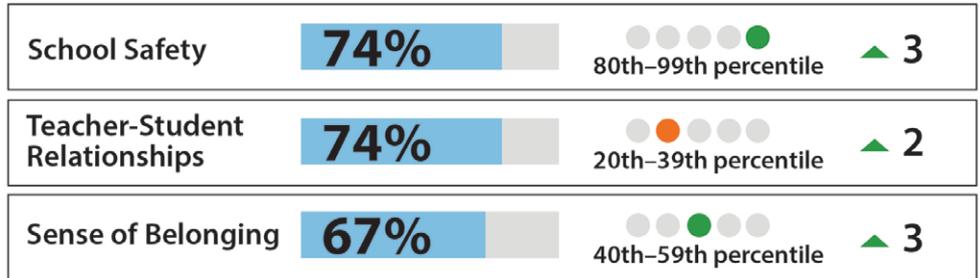
School Climate Goals Show Progress

The PAUSD promise goal for mental health and wellness is to cultivate positive identity-safe school environments that promote high levels of connection, resilience, and overall well-being throughout the school community.

Barron Park Elementary has made many strides to reach this goal. In the areas of school safety, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging students have expressed a stronger school connection through the Panorama Survey. The survey shows increases in all three areas, with the support of the district office, school staff and partnership with families.

The school district staffed all schools with full time Mental Health and Wellness counselors these past two years. It has made a huge difference on the Barron Park campus in terms of access and having staff dedicated to the mental and emotional health of students. The Barron Park Staff is amazing! Teachers, aides and front office staff tutor students before and after school. Teachers run a variety of clubs such as the green team, which focuses on recycling, leadership to build school spirit, arts and crafts, games around the world and so much more. Common areas are clean, bright, with messages that are encouraging and have self-care tips. Families have partnered with the school in bringing the Palo Alto Junior Museum to all classrooms, assemblies that are exciting, and family events

that are inclusive and accessible. Barron Park is a place where students feel safe and can work on achieving their dreams.





Brittany Gardner
Principal

Black History Month Events

With over ten events planned, Black History month at Duveneck will be a robust and carefully curated celebration of Black history, contributions, and joy. In line with our equity and excellence promise goals we have partnered with diverse members of the community to present these events. Parent Kwanza Price has been the coordinator and champion of this truly innovative approach to presenting a broad spectrum of Black American history.

We're kicking off the month with a violinist and educator presenting a series of assemblies in our music classes. Later that week, Jump Squad 510 will be visiting Duveneck to perform a Double Dutch jump-roping assembly at lunch, and the following day, a vintage jewelry maker will visit to walk students through her craft. Close to the end of February, the Tabia African American Theater Ensemble will perform two assemblies, and the month culminates in an evening celebration called Afrobeats and Eats, where Duveneck community members are invited to enjoy this popular West African music style along with some yummy cultural treats.

Throughout the month, Black speakers who work in STEM in the bay area will visit the 4th and 5th grade classes to share their experiences and lead activities. Among the speakers will be a radiologist, a chemist, UCSF professor of math, Biotech clinical developer, and more! As if that weren't enough, parent volunteers will be reading books by Black authors and books that showcase Black experiences in each classroom. Duveneck teacher librarian Doree Tschudy has selected an array of books for parents to choose from.

We are thrilled to be partnering with our Duveneck families to share these events that align with every promise goal with Duveneck students.



Duveneck students create kindness posters at lunch as part of the global Great Kindness Challenge initiative. They'll work on monitoring personal acts of kindness on their checklists all week.

El Carmelo *Elementary School*

3024 Bryant St., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/856-0960 • elcarmelo.pausd.org

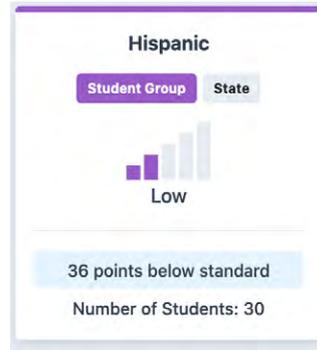


Leonel Argumedo
Principal

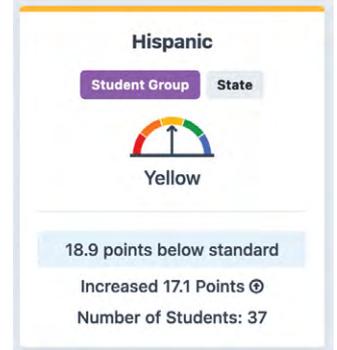
El Carmelo Shows Gains in Literacy

The PAUSD Promise of Early Literacy focuses on the Every Student Reads Initiative (ESRI). ESRI strives to reach the goal of ALL students reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3. Resources align with an “all in” approach to address early literacy. Students who enter Grade 4 at or above grade level are best prepared for future success.

The California Dashboard reflects that overall, El Carmelo is above standard in English Language Arts. The El Carmelo staff has been focusing on reaching this goal for all students. Our Latino/Hispanic group, which comprises 25% of the student population, made big gains in literacy over the last year. In 2022 students were 36 points below standard. In 2023 our Latino/Hispanic group increased 17.1 points in English Language Art, cutting the gap by almost half.



2022



2023

The school staff has worked hard implementing a new reading curriculum, dedicating time through professional development, and using small group instruction for targeted support. El Carmelo Elementary still has work to do, but I am excited the progress our students have made and proud of our teachers and staff for making this happen.



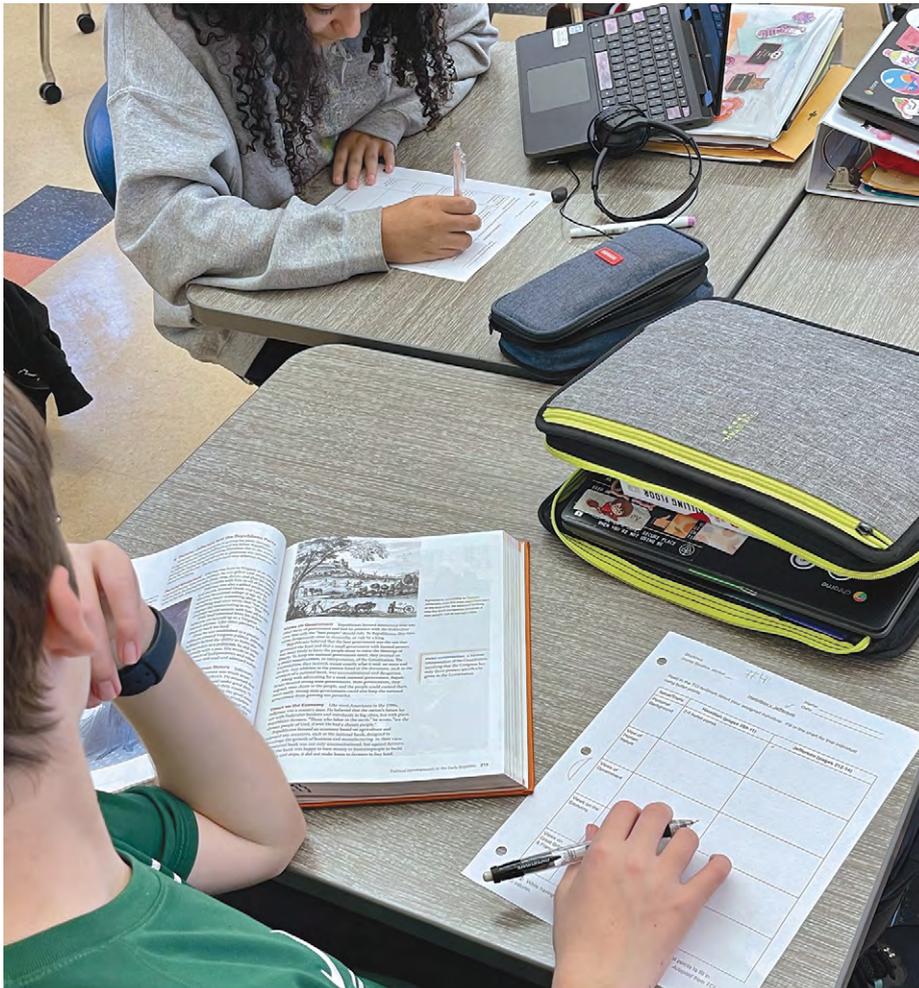
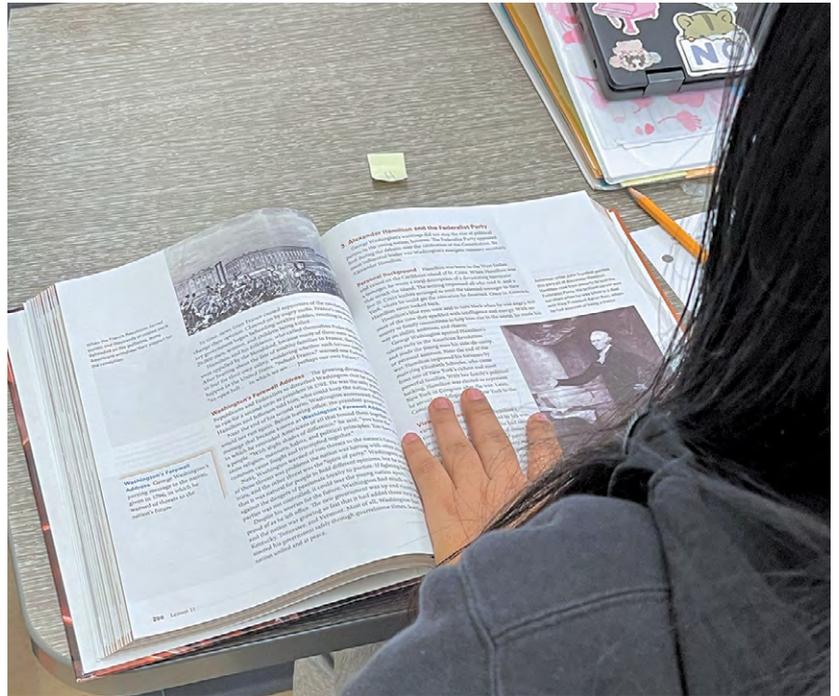


Melissa Howell
Principal

Purposeful Reading Activities

Implementing inclusive and holistic programs that promote student agency and efficacy, for all students. Creating opportunities to better access high text-complexity reading content.

Strengthening effective reading comprehension skills is integral to the educational development of students, particularly in the context of social studies classes. We have had the opportunity to pilot team taught social studies grade-level classes with a reading focus since 2021. We selected social studies as our content area of focus due to the high levels of text complexity within our textbooks and curriculum. The implementation of a focused reading instructional framework partnered with grade-level content serves as powerful tools in enhancing students' ability to grasp and analyze complex historical texts.



The classes are thoughtfully crafted to create a close-knit learning community. Within each class, two passionate and trained teachers collaborate together, as well as with the support of our Reading Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

The focused reading instructional framework plays a pivotal role in guiding students towards critical details of comprehension. By leading students through pre-reading activities, such as activating prior knowledge and setting purposeful goals, our teachers help students lay the foundation for focused reading engagement.

Piloting a focused reading instructional framework into social studies classes was a strategic approach to enhance reading comprehension. By guiding students through purposeful reading activities, active reading strategies, and post-reading reflections, our teachers are empowering students to navigate and comprehend complex social studies texts. Our goal is for students to develop a deeper understanding of social studies content, while also strengthening reading comprehension skills and interest in reading.

Escondido *Elementary School*

890 Escondido Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94305 • 650/856-1337 • escondido.pausd.org



Leslie Crane
Principal

Istation

Ready Assessment Program for our Spanish Immersion Students & Teachers (Supporting PAUSD Promise #1 - Early Literacy)

We are excited to announce that Escondido School is piloting the Istation Program to gain targeted assessment for our Spanish Immersion (SI) students to gauge their reading and oral fluency

in Spanish. We have not had a consistent Spanish assessment tool to track student performance for quite awhile. Here are some examples of how we will use the data:

1. Plan individual instructional intervention
2. Develop daily instructional strategies
3. Determine targeted goals for students and teachers
4. Monitor student and teacher progress
5. Discover professional development gaps



Istation

Just like I-Ready, which we use to measure our students' English proficiency, this program measures our student's Spanish proficiency. Once the Istation data is collected it will create individualized reinforcing lessons that are adaptable and tailored to each student's individualized learning need.

We are excited about this new assessment tool and have high hopes that it will help us to deeply identify and understand our Spanish Immersion students' mastery of reading and oral fluency.

This has been a missing piece in our program and to finally have a reliable, adaptable and research based tool will be a game changer for our SI program, teachers and students.

Palo Verde *Elementary School*

3450 Louis Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303 • 650/856-1672 • paloverde.pausd.org



Annora Lee
Principal

Here's to The Promise

We've hit the mid-year mark, and deep in our work with the PAUSD Promise.

Early Literacy: Every teacher is utilizing their training, data, creativity, and experience to make their literacy lessons come alive for our growing readers. Children are practicing and developing their reading skills in the safety of their loving and supportive classroom communities.

Equity and Excellence: Each child brings value to our school and each child's experience matters. Morning Meetings, History of Me reports, What I Need activities, are just a few examples of how our teachers and staff address this focus area with intentionality and care.

Innovation: We're growing a new generation of thinkers and innovators. Whether it be a design challenge or maker-fair, children are practicing high-leverage problem-solving and reflective thinking skills. They're learning to be flexible, persistent, and the leaders of their own learning.

Mental Health and Wellness: In addition to individual and small-group counseling sessions, our mental health therapist plans lessons around resiliency, kind words, and other grade-appropriate topics with teachers. The expansion of this focus area by our district has also benefited teachers and staff. This year, more training and access to therapeutic resources have been made to PAUSD employees.

Serve and Celebrate Others: Palo Verde eagles never fly alone, and sometimes that means lifting up others until they steady their own wings to soar. We do a lot of serving and celebrating here- stop by and you might spy one of our weekly assemblies or grade level clean up days in action. You might meet one of our many Service Club Student volunteers, who raise the flag in the morning, help kindergarteners at lunch, organize games for younger children, and greet families at morning dropoff.

I'm excited for the many more memories and experiences that are to be made this second half of the school year. Here's to The Promise, and the new heights it will take us.

Fairmeadow *Elementary*

500 E. Meadow Dr., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/856-0845 • fairmeadow.pausd.org



Iris Wong
Principal

Evidence of Progress on PAUSD Promise

At Fairmeadow Elementary, we've successfully navigated more than half of the school year with a steadfast commitment to our five priority areas for 2023-24. These areas include Serve and Celebrate Others, Mental Health and Wellness, Early Literacy, Equity and Excellence, and Innovation. Particularly, our focus on Innovation has yielded exciting developments in collaboration with the PAUSD Innovation and Agility Team. Through this partnership, our Firebirds now enjoy a variety of imaginative and creative activities

on a weekly basis, thanks to the support of PTA parent volunteers. The Innovation and Agility Team provided materials for engaging and innovative STEAM activities and games for students to explore during lunchtime. Notably, this year marked the initiation of a First Lego League "Explore" program for Fairmeadow 2nd graders, organized by one of our dedicated parent volunteers. This program enabled Fairmeadow students to collaborate in building, learn coding and science, and embrace the value of teamwork. We take pride in our progress across all priority areas, fostering a dynamic and supportive learning environment for our students at Fairmeadow Elementary.



First Fairmeadow Robotics Team

Greendell School / Herbert Hoover Elementary School

4120 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303 • 650/856-0833 • greendell.pausd.org / 4120 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94303 • 650/320-8106 • hoover.pausd.org



Nikole Manou
Principal

Serve and Celebrate Others

Hoover Elementary and Greendell School remain committed to prioritizing Serving and Celebrating Others within our school communities. We offer numerous opportunities on campus that emphasize the significance of serving to support the community and celebrating the achievements of others.

When it comes to serving others, students can volunteer in various school opportunities, such as joining the garden club, taking on recess Big Buddy roles, reading buddies, and participating in school beautification projects. Each opportunity highlights the importance of contributing to the school community in diverse ways.



For our youngest learners, Greendell students particularly enjoy collaborating with high school students who visit our campus twice a week to work with the preschoolers. This serving and mentoring relationship between high school students and preschoolers exemplifies how serving others can evolve into a reciprocal learning relationship.

Our students have a special affinity for Celebrating Others. Every Monday, during our Hoover School Assembly, we showcase students from each grade level who have demonstrated life skills that promote kindness, inclusivity, and responsibility. Students receive “Caught You Being...” award slips that celebrate their positive choices. Teachers are also recognized in the life skill celebrations, demonstrating that even adults make choices each day that exemplify life skills.

Frank S. Greene Jr. *Middle School*

750 N. California Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94303 • 650/494-8120 • greene.pausd.org



Sebastian Benavidez
Principal

Greene's Challenge Days

For three consecutive Mondays in January and February, 8th Graders at Greene Middle School will participate in the award-winning Challenge Day Program. Challenge Day is a powerful, high-energy program in which youth and adult participants are guided through a series of experiential exercises designed to increase personal power and self esteem, to shift dangerous peer pressure to positive peer support and to eliminate the acceptability of teasing, violence, and all forms of oppression. Challenge Day programs unite the members of the school and/or community and empower them to carry the themes of the program back to the greater school population. Challenge Days successfully address issues of violence, teasing, social oppression, racism, harassment, conflict management, peer pressure, and substance use.

During the program, youth are given several opportunities to speak out about what's really going on for them, and what they need from one another. Parents, teachers and school staff and community partners serve as adult volunteers for the entire day, assisting the professional facilitators in supporting small group discussions and activities with the students. While the program focuses primarily on global and community issues and concerns, individual students can and often do share personal difficulties and experiences with the group. The process of sharing is often both empowering and emotional. At the conclusion of the program, the majority of youth leave feeling bonded, empowered and committed to making a positive difference. It is a wonderful component of Greene's efforts to support the PAUSD Promise goal of Mental Health and Wellness and we're proud to offer this experience to our 8th Grade Class of 2024.



Henry M. Gunn *High School*

780 Arastradero Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/354-8200 • gunn.pausd.org



Wendy Stratton
Principal

Gunn High's AI Adventure: Innovating How We Learn

At Gunn High, we're diving headfirst into the exciting world of AI in education. Our very own Gunn Technology/AI Ad Hoc group – a cool mix of students and staff is on a mission to explore technologies that enhance learning.

The group is all about using AI tools wisely.

Our discussions have revolved around the responsible use of AI tools, particularly ChatGPT. We strive to balance the use of AI as a learning aid, not a shortcut. The versatility of ChatGPT in generating content and assisting in language and coding skills has been an area of focus as well.

Collaborating with district-level initiatives and Paly, we've concentrated on the ethical, privacy, and pedagogical implications of AI. Central to our concerns are student privacy, legal consent, and the development of digital literacy skills, which encompass responsible AI usage and academic integrity.

Our key areas of exploration include:

1. Privacy and Ethical Concerns: We are tackling the big questions about student privacy and the rules of using AI.
2. Balanced AI Use: We see AI as a sidekick in the learning journey, sparking critical thinking and enriching our studies.
3. Subject-Specific Applications: From history to science, we are thinking about how AI can jazz up different subjects.
4. Evolving Pedagogical Dynamics: It's not just students learning here; teachers are joining the fun, exploring AI as a team.
5. Upholding Academic Integrity: We are all about creating our own work and using AI to check our understanding, not to do the work for us.

Our next steps involve developing strategies to distinguish between plagiarism and learning enhancement and exploring co-learning opportunities around AI for both students and teachers.

At Gunn High School, we are committed to leading in educational innovation, preparing our students to not only face the future but to actively shape it.



Jane Lathrop Stanford *Middle School*

480 E. Meadow Dr., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/856-5188 • jls.pausd.org



Christopher Grierson
Principal

Increasing Mental Health & Wellness through Improved Relationships

If you were to search Mental Health and Wellness on the PAUSD website, you'd see that we (PAUSD) strive to provide for the social, emotional, and physical health needs of all students, staff, and families. Our goal is to cultivate positive, identity-safe school environments that promote high levels of connection, resilience, and overall wellbeing throughout the school community.

One of the ways we measure our progress is through a Panorama Survey, which is issued annually to our students. In the last year, we have seen an increase in teacher-to-student relationships, reported by our students.

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with adolescent students can be challenging, and building the trust for our students to honestly report their opinions can be even more difficult. It's with this in mind that we feel grateful for the work of our teachers and staff in getting to know our students, and working to connect with them in positive ways. Together, we are continuously working on improving our caring community and seeking input from our students helps us to identify areas of need, as well as areas of success!

For more information about our amazing school, visit our school website: www.jls.pausd.org



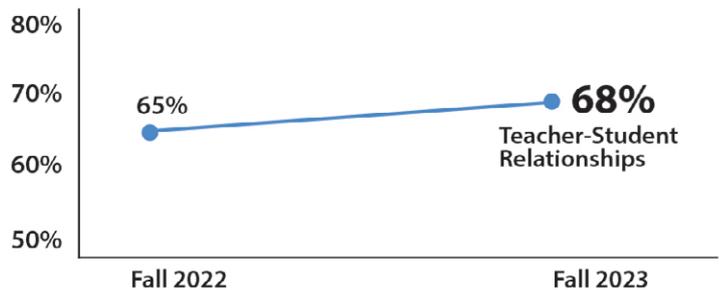
Our French teacher, Jacqui Kandell, was teaching how to say "Have a good day" in French. Students had to respond "Bonne journée" as they entered class.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Based on **967** responses

How strong the social connection is between teachers and students within and beyond the classroom.

How have results changed over time?



How did students respond to each question?

How many of your teachers are respectful towards you?	94% responded favorably	▲ 2 from Fall 2022
If you walked into class upset, how many of your teachers would be concerned?	61% responded favorably	▼ 1 from Fall 2022
If you came back to visit class three years from now, how many of your teachers would be excited to see you?	60% responded favorably	▲ 3 from Fall 2022
When your teachers ask how you are doing, how many of them are really interested in your answer?	65% responded favorably	▲ 5 from Fall 2022
How many of your teachers would you be excited to have again in the future?	60% responded favorably	▲ 4 from Fall 2022

Juana Briones *Elementary School*

4100 Orme St., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/856-0877 • briones.pausd.org



Kathryn Bimpson
Principal

Making (Bobcat) Tracks in Early Literacy at Briones!

We are very fortunate to have such talented and collaborative professionals at Briones! For the past six years we have developed an intensive reading intervention program where our Reading Specialist collaborates with K-2nd grade teachers to review student data and provide appropriate support for struggling readers. In addition to teachers working together to provide

multiple “doses” of effective reading instruction throughout the day, our Reading Specialist has trained our aides so that they are able to provide targeted reading instruction during the school day and in our after school reading support programs. Our Special Education teachers also collaborate with teachers to provide specific support for students on their caseloads.

At the beginning of the year, 16% of the students in grades K-5 had skill areas that were two or more grade levels below benchmark on the iReady reading assessment. As a result of the programs and structures we have in place to support our readers, mid-year iReady test results show that the number of students with skills two grade levels or more below benchmark has dropped to 8%. In addition, each of those students reduced the number of skill areas that were below benchmark levels and it is only the middle of the year. Additionally, 97% of the students who are receiving targeted support have raised their overall iReady score from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year.

We are exceedingly proud of our staff for the intentional and hard work they have dedicated to growing our readers at Briones and to our students for being such hard-working learners!



Author visits inspire students.



Students practice reading skills they are learning.



Small group instruction happens 4-5 times per week.

Lucille M. Nixon *Elementary School*

1711 Stanford Ave., Stanford, CA 94305 • 650/856-1622 • www.lmnixon.org



Amy Sheward
Principal

Equity & Excellence

Nixon takes immense pride in its achievements within the Palo Alto Promise focus area of Equity and Excellence. Our students all receive superb instruction from our classroom teachers. Many students also receive targeted intervention and support from our team of Reading Specialists, Math Coach, Special Education teachers, and instructional aides. Our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) team reviews referrals for support from teachers, examines available data, and collaborates on next steps to support students. This year, the launch of the Panorama platform is helping us to develop and improve this MTSS process.

Nixon's commitment to intentional equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive instruction is evident in regular staff meetings held throughout the year. Multicultural Affairs Liaisons (MALs) Chris Nosek and Sarah Bloom play pivotal roles, serving with the district-sponsored Equity and Excellence Alliance (EEA). These MALs not only share EEA insights with staff but are also leading a year-long book study on "Open Windows, Open Minds" by Afrika Afeni Mills. Kerrie Edmonds, a fourth-grade teacher and site Math Coach, further contributes to leadership in equity and inclusion, guiding staff in meaningful discussions about math instruction and support strategies for students requiring intervention or enrichment. The commitment to continuous growth in equity and inclusion reflects Nixon's dedication to serving every member of its community.



Kerrie Edmonds, 4th grade teacher and site Math Coach, leads Nixon staff in a discussion about math instruction to benefit all students.

Ohlone *Elementary School*

950 Amarillo Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306 • 650/856-1726 • ohlone.pausd.org



Elsa Chen
Principal

Celebrate + Serve = Mental Health

One of the key strategies for celebrating and serving others states that we will utilize the concepts of service, gratitude, and celebration of others as paths to improved mental wellness. At Ohlone, there are so many layers of service and celebration. A couple recent action steps stand out when I think about how we are improving on how we celebrate and serve others. And it is

important to note that these actions have a positive impact on mental health.

Celebrating Student Learning and Progress - Every day we see evidence of student growth both academically and socially. It is the reason we do what we do. We must celebrate students and call them out! At the suggestion of a teacher, we have carved out time at the start of every staff meeting to celebrate students. Teachers take time to send at least one positive email to a family. You can imagine the impact of this small gesture in strengthening the home-school connection. We do this to acknowledge student effort and progress and recognize that an added bonus is the positive impact on mental health.

Service Opportunities - The staff and families of Ohlone endeavor to increase the number of actions we take to serve our community. This is a work in progress and by sharing it here, we are holding ourselves accountable for growth in this area. Some opportunities we are working on is donating food to the Second Harvest Food Bank and diapers to the Ecumenical Hunger Program. We are also partnering with PTA to get staff and parents together for a weekend service project.



Students in service of one another.

In celebrating and serving others, we improve the mental health and wellness of our community. What better way to lift our own spirits than by lifting those around us?



Students, staff, and parents working together in service of Earth.



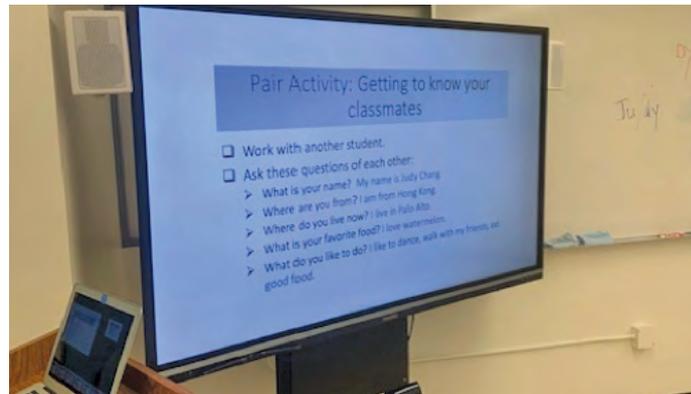
Jim Sherman
Principal

Where Diversity Thrives and Learning Soars

According to our November 2023 WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) visit, the Palo Alto Adult School “... ensures a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all students. Differentiated learning opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds and abilities are supported through instructional approaches that promote inclusivity.”

We cherish community and unite people from various backgrounds. It feels like being part of a large, supportive family where everyone shares and learns from one another. The Palo Alto Adult School emphasizes inclusivity, making sure everyone feels respected and valued.

One of the standout features of our school is its focus on supporting people learning English as a second language. More than 900 students came to us to improve their



English skills in speaking, reading, and writing in 2022-23. Although many adult schools have a high attrition of students in ESL classes, our “persistence rate” — those who stay in our programs — is higher than the State average. We also implement EL Civics modules throughout the year, and last year, of our 331 students who were eligible to complete these modules, 414 modules were completed. This is another indicator of persistence and retention as this shows students completing more than one module.

Our ESL teachers are knowledgeable and culturally responsive to the needs of our student community. Knowing that a class often has students from 10 or more countries with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, the instructor must be mindful of cultural norms and help all students come together and feel safe in their classroom. We offer flexible schedules and create an environment that’s friendly and welcoming for all. Whether it is helping students master English, gain job skills, or acquire new knowledge, our instructors ensure that learning is engaging and practical.

The Palo Alto Adult School ensures a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all students.





Brent Kline
Principal

**Promise Goal:
Mental Health and Wellness –
Promoting High Levels of Connection**

Late January saw the participation of over 500 students and 60 student leaders from Paly in a program called Breaking Down the Walls. This initiative brought together students from across the campus, aiming to foster meaningful connections, positive relationships, increase empathy and understanding, and support a thriving campus culture. Breaking Down the Walls facilitated student connections by pairing them for short, low-risk conversations using a play, trust, learn model.



The program included activities designed to build empathy and understanding. Students were given an opportunity to share parts of their life stories while learning about their peers who were also sharing theirs. The stories shared during these sessions helped participants realize that it's challenging to harbor negative feelings towards someone whose story you know.

Finally, Breaking Down the Walls focused on fostering a thriving culture. Participants left the experience feeling more connected to their peers, staff, and school.

Each workshop accommodated between 100 and 200 students, including 20 student leaders each day. Over the course of this week, we conducted three workshop days, creating pivotal moments for Paly that will contribute to building momentum towards creating a more connected and empathetic campus.



Walter Hays *Elementary School*

1525 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94301 • 650/322-5956 • hays.pausd.org



Mary Bussmann
Principal

Transformative Progress Unfolding at Walter Hays Elementary School: Equity and Excellence

Walter Hays Elementary School is on a remarkable journey toward educational Equity, aligning efforts with the PAUSD Systemwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) Plan. Guided by core values like Respect, Perseverance, Cooperation, Empathy, Inclusion, Integrity, Responsibility, Initiative, and Resilience, the school is creating an inclusive environment for every student, reflecting the objectives of the PAUSD SWIFT Plan.

In Curriculum and Instruction, the school actively ensures diverse representation by examining classroom libraries through an equity lens. Programs like the Second Step Program and Benchmark Advanced Literacy Curriculum contribute to a well-rounded educational experience.

Positive changes in School Climate are evident through tools like Panorama Surveys, assessing the overall climate, and implementing restorative practices to foster a sense of belonging. Engaging activities like Principal Mary's Livestream, Core Value Meetings, and Buddy classes enhance the social vibrancy of the school.

The Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) strategy meets unique student needs, with a Kid-by-Kid approach, small group instructions, and SEL whole group lessons promoting academic achievement, social-emotional competency, and a sense of belonging.

Professional Learning is a cornerstone, equipping staff with tools from organizations like Queerly Elementary, Step In, Speak Out, and Facing History to create an inclusive and positive school climate.

Family Engagement initiatives, including Community Conversations Evenings, Community Dinners, and Cultural Festivals, strengthen the school-family connection. These initiatives provide spaces for families to share, experience diversity, and express their thoughts about the school.

Celebrating achievements, acknowledging challenges, and recognizing the importance of ongoing efforts, Walter Hays Elementary School is dedicated to nurturing progress. The school envisions every student not only thriving but also becoming empowered learners and contributors to the global community. The transformative progress at Walter Hays Elementary is indeed a testament to the school's commitment to shaping a brighter future for all.



Equity Awards for the Transformative Work of Walter Hays Elementary