



THE PROMISE

WE LIVE HERE

A Full-Service Community School: The UPA Way



Student leaders Laurin and Eric

When asked to describe what makes UPA a community school, Laurin puts it this way: “I would define UPA as a family. It’s a community where everyone treats and respects each other equally and gets along. We feel teachers are not only teachers but friends we can trust and have confidence in. UPA is a place where you can be yourself and nobody else. It gives you the power to never give up. It’s one big community of family and friendship.”

When recently asked to describe a model community school, one Urban Promise Academy parent’s gesture – a sweep of the arms that seemed to embrace the entire campus – said it all. “For me,” explains parent Hermila Zaragosa, “it’s what we have right here. UPA is a great community school because it provides so many services, and not just for children but for families as well.”

Since its founding in 2001, UPA has aimed to create an environment where the campus serves as a hub for the community, a goal in line with the Oakland Unified School District’s “Community Schools, Thriving Students” vision. “Like a family home, you come here and open the door and feel welcome right away,” says parent Carlos Rojas. “It feels like a community of teachers, students, families, and partners.”

As parent Sofia Avalos puts it, “We live here!” A hallmark of this collaborative atmosphere is UPA’s Open School Days. “We invite families to come and walk the whole school with their kids and share observations and suggestions,” says Principal Mark Triplett. “Then we all come together and discuss everything over lunch, with groups of families and students presenting their ideas to staff.”

“I’m really happy that the school is listening when parents come to advocate for their kids,” says parent Monica Cardenas. “The school opens up for families,” agrees Avalos. “I feel like I can observe and come back and sit down with the right people and offer my ideas, leading to positive change not just for students but the entire UPA community.”

According to recently promoted UPA 8th-grader Laurin, Open School Days are empowering for the entire school community “because it’s not only each student who counts, but also their parents. UPA is not just where kids get their education. It’s not only a school but a part of your life, like a big family where

Continued on page 2

parents make sure there is a good environment for kids to grow and get a great education.”

In my view,” says her classmate Eric, “it’s a good idea to get parents in here and analyze our school and what we’re doing right and wrong, so [teachers and staff] can go back and fix things if they need to.”

A full slate of services

“Through partnerships with La Clinica de La Raza and others, we’ve been really excited to ramp up our health resources for both students and families,” says Triplett. Mental health, dental, vision, and more are all now available on-site at UPA. Avalos, whose daughter discovered she needed glasses after an on-campus eye exam, says, “I appreciate so many new programs being put in place for student needs. It’s not just education our children need but also support for health, safety, and whole-child well-being.”

To that end, through a partnership with the Oakland Parks and Recreation Department, UPA parents have led an effort to make nearby Josie de la Cruz Park a safe place for students. “Parents are creating a safe corridor through the park for our kids,” says Triplett. “They’re extending the boundary of the school to make it a larger community.”

“We’ve been working really hard to become not just a successful academic school but a successful community school,” says UPA’s first Community School Manager Glendy Cordero. “We’re really proud of what the school staff and partners are doing to support our community. Families, when they come here, they know they have a voice and access to so many different services.”



PICTURED ABOVE:
Family and student leaders who
took part in Open School Day

OUR PARTNERS

The partnerships that help make UPA a full-service community school are nearly too numerous to list. They include:

- Alameda County Food Bank
- AIM High: College-prep partner
- Bay Area Wilderness Training
- By Any Dreams Necessary: Brings resident performance artist to campus for a semester
- La Clinica de La Raza
- Oakland Leaf: After-school program provider
- Oakland Schools Foundation: Connects UPA with other schools as thought partners in OSF’s Family Engagement Professional Learning Community
- S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation: Health and wellness funding
- Stewardship Council’s Youth Investment Program
- Target
- Unity Council
- United States Postal Service
- United Way
- Wright Institute
- Zellerbach Family Foundation

SUPPORT THE UPA COMMUNITY

To sustain the partnerships that make UPA a community school, we must fundraise from the wider community. To name just two examples:

- You can support our artist-in-residence partnership by helping us purchase full-length mirrors for our new dance studio.
- To continue offering our back country WILD trips, we need to raise funds for camping stoves and water filters (among other hiking supplies).

you can help!

Please consider a tax-deductible contribution to support our partnerships. You can donate online at www.urbanpromiseacademy.org or by mail to “OSF/UPA,” P.O. Box 27148, Oakland, CA 94602.

7th-graders on the beach at Point Reyes National Seashore



URBAN PROMISE AMBASSADORS

Student Leaders Step Up to Support Harmony, Health and Wellness

Another initiative defining UPA as a community school is its Youth Wellness Council (YWC), a group of 12 7th- and 8th-grade students who offer health education to their peers at UPA. Part of the school's deep partnership with La Clinica de La Raza, the Council "[empowers] youth through fun interactive activities and discussions that develop their voice and show students that when you use your voice with intention you can help motivate others to make healthier choices and in turn feel better," says La Clinica Health Educator Karen Navarro.

During the 2011-12 school year, Wellness Council student leaders worked with classmates to encourage healthy eating, fitness, healthy relationships, and more. And their impact didn't end there: In true community-school fashion, they collaborated with nearby elementary schools World Academy and Achieve Academy to bring health education to the younger students on those campuses. They also partnered with MetWest High School to learn about gang violence prevention, and teamed up with West Oakland Middle School, Oakland Tech, and Fremont High on a research project designed to help Oakland schools offer even healthier foods in their salad bars and cafeterias.

"The Wellness Council felt safe, cool, fun, and awesome because I helped out a lot and got closer to people," says one peer educator. As another shares, "This group made me feel like a leader because I told others and myself to be healthy."

Wellness Council member Laurin (quoted earlier in this newsletter) also took part in two other student leadership initiatives: Student Site Leadership and Peer Panel. "It's a big

responsibility," she explains. "It's something really important because you have to be a role model for kids smaller than you. We have to keep being leaders. No matter what, you keep your head up and have confidence toward everything in life. That's the way you grow as a person."

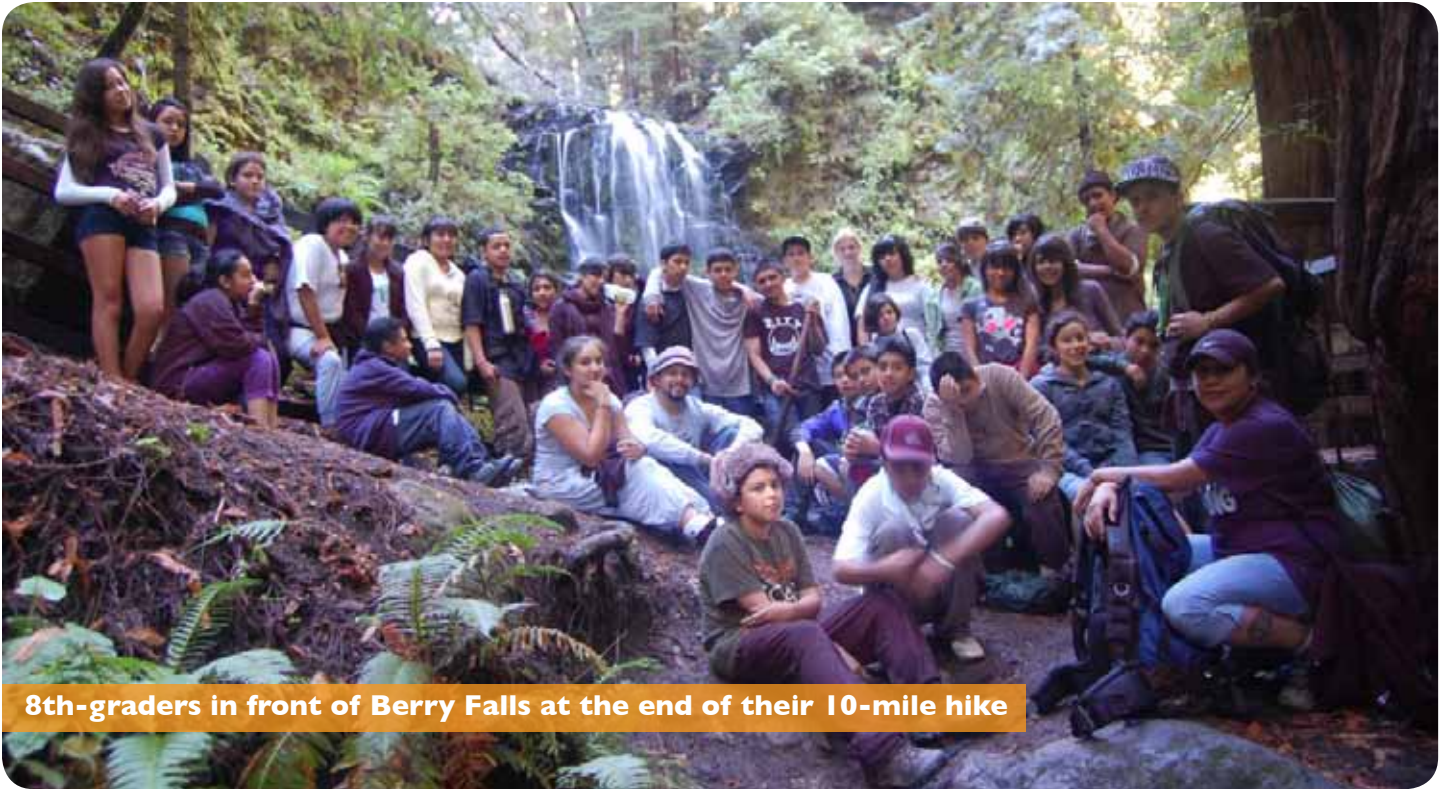
"[Student Site Leadership members] educate the younger 6th-graders about obstacles they might face later in life," says her classmate Eric. "We talked to them about bullying, smoking prevention, and we did a lesson on erasing homophobia. That's a big deal right now. People who are LGBT get mistreated because of who they are and that's truly unfair for them. I feel honored to be on the team because we help other students and support their well-being."

Into the Great WILD Open

UPA also values extending its community school partnerships even farther off campus. In support of the school's WILD program (Wilderness, Independence, Leadership Development), staff has connected with Bay Area Wilderness Training (BAWT) in order to expand WILD field trips to all grades.

"BAWT is so incredibly supportive of what we do with WILD," says 8th-grade teacher Jill Johnson. For the 8th-graders' overnight trip to Big Basin Redwoods State Park, she says, "We basically checked out their entire gear library. We had to get a U-Haul for all of it, and they told us we take out more students than anyone else they work with."

Continued on back page



8th-graders in front of Berry Falls at the end of their 10-mile hike

“[Adding the Big Basin trip this year] was really cool because now all students at UPA have a WILD trip,” says Johnson. Thanks to the BAWT gear lending library, more than 100 8th-graders took to the woods with backpacks filled with tents, sleeping bags, cooking equipment, water filters, and food.

A highlight of the trip was an epic 10-mile hike, which every student finished. “It was a long way and the paths were muddy and some people slipped,” 8th-grader Jose recalls, “and carrying everything in our packs up the hills, we had a lot of weight on us. But then after we made it, at the end, we came to the big waterfall.” [The kids are pictured at Berry Falls on this page.]

Johnson says students also stepped up during cooking time. A couple boys “jumped in a said, ‘I got this,’” she recalls. “They just wanted to take care of everyone, make sure everyone is fine.” This nurturing mindset made many students appreciate their parents back home. “When they shared their appreciations, they were really toward their families, with kids saying, ‘Now I understand how much they have to do for us, how much work it takes.’”

For the fourth year running, 7th-graders’ trip to Point Reyes National Seashore set a positive tone for the school year. “It’s really powerful going the first week of school as far as building community and teachers getting to know students,” shares 7th-grade teacher Alison Ball. Unplugged from their electronics – and electricity, period – the kids connected in new ways. “We

bonded in the cabin,” says 7th-grader Kristian, “and we had to be more friendly and really support each other to climb the steep hills on our hike.”

“There was no electricity,” says 7th-grader Maria, “but on the night hike we got to see the light from the stars and the shooting stars.” The night hike to the beach is a favorite memory for the kids. “It was fun,” says 7th-grader Julien, “because in the dark it seemed like the hike would never end. We didn’t know there was a beach at the end.”

Environmental stewardship and consciousness is another priority on these trips. Three days at Point Reyes helped students “realize how delicate the forest is, and that we need to protect it,” says one 7th-grader. And for some, the trips are a chance to tap into their WILD spirit. As one student puts it, “[Point Reyes] released my inner animal!”

The 6th-grade WILD camping trip to the Presidio in San Francisco also offered an environment where teachers saw leaders emerge in unexpected ways. “During our hike,” says 6th-grade teacher Leah Rotkin-Ellman, “we saw students acting like leaders who were not usually leaders in a classroom setting. They were really supportive in helping others overcome obstacles, and seemed to get in touch with a part of themselves they’re not used to.” One 6th-grader’s reflection summed up the impact resoundingly: “I will remember this trip for as long as I live.”



URBAN PROMISE ACADEMY

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