

Addressing the Needs of the Whole Child: The Complementary Learning Approach in Oakland

Introduction

Oakland Unified School District offers a range of support services and programs designed to address the needs of our students and families. These programs are supported by OUSD's Complementary Learning Department and brokered through strong relationships with other public agencies and Oakland's rich network of community-based organizations.

As a District, we recognize that it is not enough to focus on a strong academic program alone. Therefore, we are committed to supporting the growth of full service community schools, able to support learning in all contexts and beyond the hours of the traditional school day, as well as to provide a wide range of health and wellness services that meet the needs of the whole child so that all of our students are ready to learn and succeed academically and socially.

This process begins in early childhood, and our extended learning opportunities also begin at that stage.

Early Childhood Education

The Early Childhood Education program is designed to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of both our preschool and school aged children. The program emphasizes the preschool to Kindergarten transition and is aligned with the District's goals of having each preschool aged child ready for Kindergarten and having all children able to read, write, calculate and communicate on grade level by 3rd grade. In order to accomplish these goals, the preschool children are exposed to developmentally appropriate materials, activities, and routines that will support their transition into the Kindergarten classroom. To strengthen the link between Preschool activities and the K-3 program, we use early literacy materials that are aligned with the elementary curriculum.

A number of community agencies work in partnership with the Early Childhood program to provide services to children and their families including providing mental health services at all of our sites and a summer Pre-K Camp for children with no preschool experience who are entering kindergarten.

In order to ensure a strong home/school connection when children move from preschool into Kindergarten and beyond, a Transition Specialist has helped to design and implement a plan to support children, families, and staff during the time that children are in preschool and moving into Kindergarten. The goal of the Transition Plan is to develop effective relationships that meet individual family needs and provide flexibility to ensure successful transitions for each family. Additionally, staff and administrators work closely with families to increase their

capacity to become academic advocates, as well as to understand the importance of school attendance, early literacy and reading with their children early and often.

After School Programs

The Oakland Unified School District, in partnership with community-based organizations, offers comprehensive after school programming at more than 80 schools serving approximately 8,500 school children on any given day. These programs allow students to explore new interests and build meaningful skills in a safe and supportive environment. Students participate in academic support activities ranging from homework help and tutoring, to credit recovery classes and high school exit exam prep. Children and youth also have the opportunity to engage in learning activities that are different than their regular school day experiences, including dance, cooking, computer animation, martial arts, and team sports such as soccer and volleyball.

Evaluation findings show that after school participants have improved school day attendance and engagement, better social interaction with peers and adults, and improved safety in the after school hours when youth are most vulnerable to crime, violence, and involvement in risky behaviors.

After school programs also have a positive impact on families. Nearly two-thirds of parents report that they are able to stay in school or hold a job because of their child's participation in the afterschool program. Programs provide parent education workshops and volunteer opportunities that help parents feel more connected to the school, and more involved in their child's education.

Summer Learning Programs

Summer Learning Programs align District and community resources to provide summer learning opportunities to 8,000 students during the summer. Without these opportunities, all children experience learning losses over the summer months with most students losing about two months of grade level equivalency in math skills. In addition, low-income students lose more than two months of reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle class peers make slight gains.

Summer activities include such programs as **Pre-K Camp**, elementary and middle school **Academic Support Programs**, **Algebra Academies**, and **High School Credit Recovery**. In addition, activities include **Transitional Programs** – supporting students moving into middle school and high school, as well as Migrant and Refugee students. Summer is also an important time to weave in outside support such as **Student Teacher Training Programs** from local colleges and universities and **health and wellness** programs like summer vision screenings and health education.

By partnering with families, and by expanding students' learning well beyond the school day, OUSD's extended learning programs are helping children and youth develop the academic and social skills they need to be successful in school and in life.

Health and Wellness

Research shows that there is a direct link between the health of our students and their academic success. OUSD students and their families are faced with high rates of obesity, asthma, diabetes and other chronic diseases; low access to healthcare, physical activity and healthy foods; and trauma from frequent exposure to community violence.

School Wellness and Climate:

Schools play a vital role in promoting student wellness. The school wellness policy was developed to address these issues by promoting healthy behaviors and environments as part of a positive school climate. As a District, we help develop partnerships and link resources to schools to improve access to healthy food, exercise, and indoor air quality. Ultimately, the goal is that all schools provide wellness programs and practices, such as school breakfast, gardening, quality physical education and safe indoor and outdoor learning environments for students, families and staff.

Oakland's Restorative Justice Initiative presents another opportunity to impact school climate. Restorative practices for students, staff and families, create opportunities for those impacted by a harmful or tragic event to collectively determine the impact and the steps to reduce the impact for everyone involved or affected.

Health Services:

We also offer direct health services to ensure that students are healthy and ready to learn.

School Based Mental Health services provide easily accessible emotional support, consultation to teachers and families and crisis intervention; reduce student distress which interferes with learning; increase connections to supportive adults; facilitate improved attachment, attendance, and achievement; and foster healthy and pro-social relationships for all students.

To address the physical health needs of our students, a team of credentialed nurses provide a range of services including preventive screenings and case management for students with chronic conditions.

Additionally, OUSD's network of School-Based Health Centers offer a range of medical, mental health, health education and youth development services to thousands of Oakland students each year. These health centers are a partnership between OUSD, Alameda County, the City of Oakland and number of community-based organizations.

Integration of Services

OUSD believes that in order to fully support young people, the integration of all support services is critical. One example of this integration is the Coordination of Services Team (or COST), composed of all support service providers at the school site as well as school site staff. COST members might include site coordinators, teachers, school administrators, family advocates, school counselors, after school supports, school nurses, and mental health therapists. Weekly COST meetings provide a regular opportunity to field referrals from the school community, assess students' non-academic support needs, and provide appropriate case management to ensure that these needs are met.

Additionally, Family Support Services are integrated into the school setting and provide opportunities for families to increase their capacity to support their students at home. Services such as adult education courses, on-site food pantries and legal clinics are located at the school site to help address the various needs of our families and connect families to the school in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

The Complementary Learning Department is actively partnering with schools, agencies, families and the broader community to enhance the supports available to students and families. OUSD is well on its way toward the goal of becoming a full service community district, with the structures and programs in place to support the whole child so that they can achieve success in school and life.

For further information, please contact: Jane Nicholson
Executive Officer
Complementary Learning
Oakland Unified School District
495 Jones Avenue
Oakland, CA 94603
U.S.A.
jane.nicholson@ousd.k12.ca.us