

Ocean Charter School Diversity Committee
Annual Update

2009/10



HICKS

Discovery Education Clip Art Gallery
Mark A. Hicks, Illustrator

During the 2009/10 academic year, the OCS Diversity Committee continued its outreach efforts to diverse families in OCS-adjacent neighborhoods and worked to promote and maintain a campus culture and organizational practices that we hope will attract and sustain a more diverse OCS community. This Annual Update provides highlights of the year's activities and findings.

Background

In 2008, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) renewed the OCS charter under the condition that OCS strive diligently to improve its ethnic balance, with the goal of bringing its enrollment more closely in line with that of the district as a whole. This mandate charges OCS to develop strategies that improve ethnic balance, to quantify its progress in the short term and to see steady annual progress. The OCS Diversity Committee was empanelled by the OCS Board of Trustees to help OCS meet these objectives. OCS will again be requesting a charter renewal in 2013.

Ocean Charter School's Commitment to Diversity

OCS supports and embraces diversity in all its forms, including differences in ethnicity, cultural and religious heritage, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, geographic origin, student abilities and family structure. We strive to provide our students with a rich, inclusive, Waldorf-informed curriculum that reflects the urban environment in which we live and to foster a safe atmosphere where every member of the community is respected and multiple viewpoints can be peacefully expressed. OCS actively seeks to achieve diversity in all aspects of school life including the composition of our student body, faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees. We believe this commitment to diversity will help our children successfully navigate the changing world they will one day inherit.

2010 OCS Board of Trustees Resolution

On April 15th 2010 the OCS Board of Trustees unanimously approved and adopted an important resolution submitted by the Diversity Committee. This resolution gives clear support and direction for OCS diversity efforts. The resolution states:

Whereas, we place great value on preparing OCS students to be productive, active members of the Los Angeles community; and,

Whereas, we envision an OCS enrollment that better reflects the cultural, social and ethnic mosaic of its campus locations and the greater Los Angeles community; and,

Whereas, OCS desires to be a progressive educational institution, proactive partner and positive contributor to building greater community with its campus neighbors, as well as a model for diversity among Los Angeles public education providers; and,

Whereas, we hope to introduce our Waldorf inspired curriculum, which is inherently multicultural and diverse, to a wider cross section of our community.

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the Board of Trustees of Ocean Charter School does hereby:

1. Define "diversity" as "The collective strength of experiences, skills, talent, abilities, and cultural perspectives that each student, teacher, staff member and parent brings to Ocean Charter School and the greater community.
2. Recognize that, as a fundamental step toward building greater diversity, OCS desires greater representation in its student enrollment of a broad socio-economic background and traditionally under-represented and under-served ethnic minority groups, specifically: individuals of Latino, African American, Native American and Asian American ethnic heritage.
3. Affirm that our goal is to increase the representation of these groups in the applicant pool by at least 5% per year.
4. Charge the Diversity Committee to develop, for Board of Trustees review and approval, annual plans with specific objectives and activities designed to achieve this goal.

Outreach Efforts

A primary task of the Diversity Committee is to create and implement an effective outreach plan to make more diverse families aware of OCS and to encourage them to enter the enrollment lottery. Although the OCS Charter prohibits preference based on race or ethnicity, we expect that a greater diversity in the applicant pool will eventually bring greater diversity to our student body.

The Diversity Committee's outreach efforts in 2009/10 included distributing brochures and flyers about OCS (in both English and Spanish) to more than 25 preschools, churches, and community organizations in adjacent neighborhoods (Mar Vista, Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Venice, Culver City, and Westchester). Overall, families and administrators expressed great interest in OCS, and many asked for more information about the school. Some of the issues and questions that arose included: the availability of before/after school care, transportation, school-provided lunches, and the Waldorf curriculum. Next year, we plan to begin outreach earlier, invite families to OCS school events, and deliver more presentations directly to parents. We also plan to re-design our communication materials to be even more effective.

OCS Applicant Pool Data

OCS received 551 lottery entries to enroll for the 2010/11 school year (a 42% increase over the previous year). The number of children reported as non-white ethnic minorities (African American, Latino, Asian, or American Indian) was 47% compared to 39% non-white in the previous year's applicant pool (2009-2010).

	2010/11 Applicants	2009/10 Applicants
White	53%	58%
Hispanic/Latino	17%	14%
African American	9%	13%
Asian * Includes Asian, Pacific Islander and Filipino	17%	11%
American Indian	2%	1%
Multi-race/	1.3%	
No response	0.2%	5%

We are encouraged by these numbers, but because we have so few open spots available each year, we know that it will take some time to increase the number of children enrolled in our school who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Diversity Dialogues

Diversity Dialogues during both 2008/09 and 2009/10 provided an open discussion format for parents, administration and faculty to reflect on a variety of multicultural topics relevant to Ocean Charter's families. Participants explored social justice, values, cultural and ethnic diversity, inclusiveness, sensitivity and awareness. These discussions provided OCS community members a safe, non-judgmental setting to share perspectives and to learn about diversity issues as they relate to their parenting, the school environment and our greater community.

Nine Diversity Dialogues were held in 2008/09 and 2009/10, featuring presentations and facilitation by OCS teachers, the school ombudsperson and parents. At the core of these events were engaging, meaningful discussions around the subject of diversity, ultimately fostering deeper connections among community members. For example, in one Diversity Dialogue, facilitator Page Leong incorporated cultural themes underlying the Lantern Festival into the discussion of the evening. In another, the group reveled in a drum circle, led by OCS drum teacher, Marcus Miller. The gatherings led to engaging, meaningful discussions, ultimately fostering deeper connections among community members. Dialogues were held on both campuses and were attended by 15-30 persons, with representation from parents, staff and administration.

Presently, the Dialogues are being redesigned to further engender a consciousness around diversity; to utilize our rich resources and community action ideas through multicultural events, education and art; to be responsive to concerns and ideas about diversity at OCS; and to foster inclusiveness and deep community building. A meeting will be scheduled before the end of the school year to finalize the overall approach to Dialogues in 2010/11. The Diversity Committee encourages all members of the OCS community to participate.

Diversity Dialogues are co-facilitated by Page Leong and Shishir Kurup. They are both members of Cornerstone Theater Company, and for the past 16 years have been making plays with and for diverse communities across Los Angeles and nationwide. Diversity is a core value of the company and is actively sought, engaged and celebrated in their work.

2010/11 Preview

The OCS Diversity Committee is outlining plans for a productive 2010/11 academic year. All members of the OCS community are encouraged to join Committee members in these activities. Preliminary plans are being discussed at the next several Committee meetings. Our primary objectives for 2010/11 include:

- Refine and implement an effective outreach plan to make more diverse families aware of OCS and to encourage them to enter the enrollment lottery.
- Collaborate with OCS administration to collect and report comprehensive enrollment data.
- Promote opportunities for the OCS community to develop greater awareness of and appreciation for the history and contributions of diverse groups in Los Angeles.
- Seek funding for staff and program support to carry out diversity related activities, as approved by the OCS Board of Trustees.
- Improve retention of diverse families at OCS.
- Work with the Administration to increase diversity of faculty and staff by broadening the base of the faculty/staff searches to include a more diverse pool of applicants.

Committee Happenings

The Diversity Committee bids farewell to four of its founding members this year. Founding Chairperson Marcela Washington resigned mid-year and is spending more well-deserved time with her family and loved ones. Marcela's leadership and vision helped immeasurably to guide the Committee during its formative phase. Stephanie Nevels-Yanchar left the Committee when her husband accepted a coaching position with the Seattle Seahawks of the National Football League. Additionally, Charmaine Johanson will conclude her service to the Committee at the end of the academic year to pursue some exciting new opportunities and spend more time with her family. MaryAnn Malcomb will be concluding her service to the Committee at the end of the academic year as well. The dedication and passion of these Committee members contributed immensely to OCS and they will be missed.

The Diversity Committee is excited to introduce and welcome Patrick Salazar as the new Chairperson. He was elected in February 2010. Patrick is a parent of a Kindergarten child at OCS and a previous OCS 7th grade student. He has more than 20 years experience serving higher education and community-based organizations in senior staff and consulting roles in fundraising, strategic planning and communications. His expertise includes program development, public sector grants and cultivation of corporate, foundation and major donor relations. OCS and the Diversity Committee are fortunate to have his expertise and leadership skills to help guide the Diversity Committee's work through the next academic year.

Committee Membership

The Diversity Committee needs your help to achieve these goals! There are several new committee member positions available. Please contact any member of the Committee to learn more about serving either as a member or with events and outreach.

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In Conclusion

The Diversity Committee thanks everyone who took part in our efforts and activities this past year, including the parents who came to Diversity Dialogues and Diversity Committee meetings, parents who helped with our outreach efforts to local preschools and organizations, the faculty, OCS Administration and staff, and the Board of Trustees. This is a very important focus at OCS and we appreciate everyone's willingness to engage and to help us accomplish our goals. We look forward to a productive 2010/11 year.