

The Elmhurst Beat

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Elmhurst trumpeters showcasing their skills



DREAM. PREPARE. ACHIEVE.

Our Four Theories of Action:

- *High Academic Achievement*
- *Collaboration*
- *Family Involvement*
- *Positive School Culture*

Elmhurst Music Program Setting the Tone

Helena Jack, who directs the jointly run Elmhurst-Alliance Academy (ECP-AA) music program with help from Steven Nares, is fiercely proud of what the Elmhurst community has accomplished musically: "Oakland doesn't have another school that has what we're offering," she says.

"Exposure is the key to educating our kids," says Jack. "Expose them to other genres, festivals, and give them lots of personal time." To this end, the Stanford Jazz Workshop has adopted Elmhurst and Alliance, offering the schools 12 \$1,700 scholarships for a week-long residency, where students are "exposed to the most incredible level of musicianship and an environment of higher education." Jack would love the young musicians to be more visible in the community: "We have a huge, successful program," she says. "But we're a middle school in the 'hood, so nobody knows."

Recently, the emphasis on exposure has found a fresh context: benefit concerts. This year, Elmhurst's musicians have played at the Night of Jazz in Oakland (raising around \$14,000), and at the annual Principals Cup Golf Tournament (which brought in \$13,000). These events serve a dual purpose: Elmhurst's players get to showcase their talents on a big stage, in front of new and large audiences. And they raise money for the music program at the same time.

For the first three years, the music program was funded through a grant from the city of Oakland – but that has now expired. In order to sustain and expand the music program, the school will need to secure

new sources of funding. "After building the program to this point, it would be such an awful thing to lose," says Jack. "It's all about the kids," she says. "Music is of great value to the academic process. There's a direct correlation to academics -- music is math with sound. I see a difference in the kids with their participation in school and how they communicate. Music's international, there are no boundaries!"

If you'd like to make a tax-deductible donation to support the music program, you can write and send a check to "OSSF/Elmhurst," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620, or visit www.smallschoolsfoundation.org (designating "Elmhurst").



At the 2008 Elmhurst Honor Roll Banquet



Elmhurst Community Prep is a member of the Oakland Small Schools Foundation Network. www.smallschoolsfoundation.org



Left: A student-led conference; Above: Honor Roll students

Student-Led Conferences Engage Elmhurst Families

When reflecting on the genesis of Elmhurst's student-led conferences, history teacher and advisory program coordinator Christina "Ms. V" Villareal recalls an experience from her days in graduate school. "I remember vividly a woman who showed us a video of her students presenting their portfolios to their families. It was a 3rd-grader and his mom, and to see the kid open up his portfolio and start explaining what he'd been learning – it was incredible," she says. "It moved me and stayed with me."

Villareal referenced this during conference planning meetings at Elmhurst, and the idea was in line with teachers' belief that the school should move beyond traditional parent-teacher conferences. Teachers and advisors embraced the idea of students choosing meaningful pieces of work from their core classes, and decided to involve the students in every aspect of the conferences, even the early planning. Students design invitations, invite the families, then create their individual portfolios and practice their presentations.

On the big day, each student leads his or her conference from beginning to end, sitting with family members and presenting portfolios of work. Parents are given a checklist of questions to ask, in order to

spur discussion and a dialogue so families can share in the learning process. After the presentation, teachers give parents their child's report card, and the student explains the grades, both good and bad. The conference ends with students and families setting academic and personal goals together, discussing what they'll need both at home and at school to achieve them.

"There's something to be said for students taking ownership," says Villareal. "It's no longer the teacher saying 'Joe got a B,' it's the kid saying 'I got a B because...' You really see kids owning that grade." Villareal loves to see them take the opportunity so seriously. "It's something they do anticipate and get nervous about it," she says. "One of my kids showed up in a blazer and said, 'I'm ready for my SLC!'" That particular session lasted more than two hours, with his 22-year-old brother captivated the entire time. When the student mentioned lemurs during his presentation on nocturnal animals, his brother exclaimed, "The lemur's my favorite!" "These are the little things you can't plan for," says Villareal. "I think that interaction is so much more powerful than just teacher and parent. It's part of what ECP is about – we're big on family involvement. Bringing in families for collaborations like this adds to the positive school culture."

Elmhurst's Young Scientists Shine at Family Science Night

Family Science Night, run in collaboration with the Chabot Space & Science Center, invites students and families to participate in science experiments and demonstrations (see photo at right). "Some dealt with vision and light waves and how those related to space," explains teacher Jessica Eastman. "[Another showed] how to make the most aerodynamic rocket, against a backdrop of the solar system, for context. The room was packed with students and families doing science!"

Elmhurst science teachers made a point to discuss Science Night in class the following day. "In class," recalls Eastman, "all the kids were talking about which experiment was their favorite."

