

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Julie Ballesteros  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Oka (Isojiro) Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 9800 Yorktown Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Huntington Beach State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 92646-2841

County Orange County

Telephone (714) 378-4260 Fax (714) 378-4269

Web site/URL https://oka.fvsd.us/ E-mail ballesterosj@fvsd.us

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Mark Johnson E-mail johnsonm@fvsd.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Fountain Valley School District Tel. (714) 843-3200

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Sandra Crandall  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)  
 Suburban  
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	15	7	22
K	49	32	81
1	45	30	75
2	31	35	66
3	38	46	84
4	54	44	98
5	32	34	66
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	264	228	492

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 12.5 % Asian
  - 0.9 % Black or African American
  - 29 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.9 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 46.2 % White
  - 10.2 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 12%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	52
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	58
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	490
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.12
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	12

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin (Putonghua), Japanese, Arabic, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Swedish, Other Non- English

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 6 %  
31 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 20 %  
 Total number students who qualify: 98

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
49 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>20</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>27</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 26:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

The Oka Elementary Community is committed to creating a strong educational foundation and positive learning environment that promotes success for every child.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

Oka Elementary School implemented a modified hybrid instructional model for the 2020-2021 school year. The schedule consists of modified virtual Mondays, wherein all students in each teacher’s class meet online via Zoom from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The afternoons on Mondays have been reserved for teacher and site planning. Tuesdays through Fridays, students are split into even groups, and attend either an “AM” session or a “PM” session on campus for two hours and thirty-five minutes per group.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Oka Elementary School is a high performing Title I school serving over 400 students in grades K-5 in the Fountain Valley School District. The Oka Wolfpack community of students, staff and families is a devoted team that is committed to giving everything they have to support the success of each student. As a school community, we reflect the true meaning of Rudyard Kipling's quote, displayed on our campus walls. "For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack." Based upon the latest CAASPP test results, 70% of Oka's students are performing at grade level or above in ELA, and 79% of students are performing at grade level or above in math. Over the first five years of taking the Smarter Balanced Assessment, these scores demonstrate an 8% gain in achievement in ELA and a remarkable 21% gain in achievement in math.

The Oka school staff consists of a highly dedicated educators who continuously work to provide our students with an outstanding program in a supportive environment. We take pride in our belief that every child can be successful and show our commitment by providing various educational opportunities that help all students to access their full potential. The staff actively encourages a positive growth mindset in our classrooms and throughout our school campus. Our teachers, staff, and administrator continuously act on the principle that students come first and the belief that school is not only about the educational opportunities and experiences but also about building memories that will last a lifetime.

In addition, our parent community consists of families that are fully dedicated to ensuring that their students have access to an exceptional educational program. Across our school campus, parents regularly volunteer time to read with students, help with small group instruction, or to support teachers in preparing instructional materials. The relationships that grow over the course of a school year among students, staff and parents, support the development of a well-rounded child and leave lasting impressions on students, who are able to observe firsthand that the adults around them care deeply about their well-being and their overall success in school.

Oka has a number of key strategies that have been implemented to support the academic, social and emotional, physical, artistic and cultural well-being of our students. With regard to our instructional program, teachers have been trained in Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI), Balanced Literacy, Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) Reading Assessments, which are commonly referred to as our Signature Practices. While all three are important, the implementation of F&P reading assessments has greatly impacted the instruction within the school. Teachers know their students as readers better than ever before, and are able to provide each student with the most appropriate instruction to further develop their reading skills. Teachers are instructionally more diagnostic and prescriptive, which plays a significant role in student growth. We are tremendously confident that the ongoing work in these areas will further drive positive student outcomes at Oka, while also helping us to further refine and articulate a cohesive instructional core.

One of the unique programs at Oka that also contributes to the social, emotional and behavioral well-being of our students, and promotes a strong school culture, is the implementation of The Wolfpack Way! The Wolfpack Way is focused on everyone at Oka, Being Responsible, Being Safe, & Being Respectful. The Wolfpack Way provides clear examples of positive behavior for students, systems for student support, as well as a foundation for students to improve, grow, and own their futures as life-long learners.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged and united Oka's students, staff and families. During the initial closure, we all had to adapt to teaching virtually, via Zoom, as well as find new and creative ways to engage with students. Teachers and parents communicated regularly, and lesson plans were posted each week to support individual, small group, and whole group instruction. Additionally, we worked together to share positive videos, recorded announcements and read alouds to boost student morale. Virtual spirit days, STEM challenges, student awards, flag ceremonies and a talent show were also held online for the whole school. Our 5th Grade Promotion was celebrated in a drive-thru ceremony.

This year, teachers have continued to modify instructional lessons to fit the needs of their students within our hybrid instructional model. Our staff has resiliently been able to shift and change, when necessary, in

order to continue to provide high standards based instruction, focus on signature practices of workshop and CGI, while still ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to learn and grow in a loving and supportive environment.

Oka has earned the honor of both California Gold Ribbon and California Distinguished School in the past. These awards have helped to validate the work we have been doing, while also pushing us to strive for more. We will continue our commitment to build a strong school culture and effective practices to best serve the diverse needs of our school community.



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

In order to accommodate the shift to distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Oka Elementary School followed the direction of the Fountain Valley School District (FVSD), and all schools moved to one hundred percent online learning in the Spring of 2020. The Oka teachers did a wonderful job in leveraging the past five years of intensive professional development to create virtual lessons focused on the core content areas of math, English, history, science, and physical education (PE). Initially, this included the need to digitize current materials, such as adopted textbooks, the utilization of online resources such as ST Math, and learning how to use the virtual meeting platform, Zoom. Our school calendar afforded the instructional staff thirteen weeks of distance learning, providing time to modify in-person instructional techniques to a virtual instructional model.

From March, 2020 to June, 2020, the entire school district maintained a virtual only option for all students. For the Oka staff, this time period allowed for us to pull on our previous trainings in the areas of Balanced Literacy for English-Language Arts, Cognitively Guided Instruction in Math, expand our then curriculum pilot in science to all teachers, and modify history content from the current adoption to provide a high quality core program. Additionally, the instructional staff integrated physical education lessons focused on healthy practices at home, as well as arts and virtual social opportunities in order to round out the broad course of study previously offered in-person.

As we progressed through spring of 2020, students were assessed using a variety of past and new tools, helping Oka staff to meet the challenge of online learning. New assessment tools such as IXL were purchased by the district, which allowed Oka grade level teams to offer online diagnostics in the areas of Math and ELA. This tool also provided specific recommendations for each student, based on their diagnostic levels, from which Oka teachers created virtual small learning groups during online Zoom sessions. Additionally, based on past work utilizing the Fountas & Pinell reading assessment, wherein each student was assessed in the fall and winter of the 2019-20 school year, teacher and reading intervention teachers, continued their work providing target reading instruction, and intervention where appropriate. Finally, many teachers continued to modify print assessments, creating digital versions for students to access them from home, and even went so far as to accept pictures from the personal device of a student's family member, in order to accommodate and evaluate the learning of all students.

Moving into the 2020-21 school year, and due to safety protocols put forth to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19, FVSD universally implemented a modified hybrid instructional model for all of its elementary schools. The schedule consists of modified virtual Mondays, wherein all students in each teacher's class meet online via Zoom from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The afternoons on Mondays have been reserved for teacher and site planning, which has enabled the Oka staff to continue their collaboration, and support each other in the development of lessons. During Tuesdays through Fridays, students are split into even groups, and attend either an "AM" session or a "PM" session for two hours and thirty-five minutes per group. This enabled the site to reduce class sizes for each session, allowing for up to sixteen students per teacher in each session. When students are not attending an in-person session, teachers then assign "self-guided" work in the core content areas to both meet the California state minimum requirements under COVID-19, but to provide additional at-home learning opportunities to students. While having students back in-person has allowed teachers to return to many of the successful practices previously utilized pre-pandemic, it also enabled the Oka staff to continue to use online assessments and learning platforms such as IXL and ST Math, Raz Kids, NewsELA, Accelerated Reader, Google Classroom, Mystery Science and Brain Pop.

Oka students and teachers engaging in both new and traditional ways to incorporate our signature practices while adhering to safety requirements. Teachers have gone above and beyond enhance learning with outdoor instruction, individual hands-on STEAM experiments and leveled home reading book bags.

From September 2020 through December 2020, many teachers used their break between the cohorts and Monday planning time to complete individual student assessments or to provide small groups interventions. Beginning in January 2021, we made a significant shift to reinstate our reading intervention program. Our

reading specialist and teachers worked together to analyze data and create groups for in person reading interventions. We are currently serving 50 students four days a week in our leveled literacy intervention program.

**1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

**1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

Our preschool program incorporates hands-on developmentally appropriate activities in conjunction with foundational academics aligned with our district signature practices. Our early childhood education, transitional kindergarten and kindergarten grade level teams work collaboratively to develop a consistent and quality program that provides a strong foundation for our students' educational journey in FVSD.

Our We Can curriculum along-side Preschool GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) is implemented to support literacy and language development. CGI (Cognitively Guided Instruction) strategies are implemented to support the mathematical thinking of our students. Preschool students are formally assessed two times a year, using the Desired Results Developmental Profile. These results are analyzed by our early education and kindergarten team in addition to our annual EDI (Early Developmental Index) survey. This data is used to determine strengths and areas of need within our program. The team collectively will enhance curriculum to support growth and development in these areas. All of our preschool students upon entry are registered in the district's Aeries student information system. We are able to track students throughout their elementary and secondary education as long as they remain a student in our school district. Data from our annual Early Developmental Index, shows that students who attend our preschool program and transition into our kindergarten classes are more prepared and advanced than those attending preschool outside of the district.

This year our staff, in compliance with the CDC and Community Care State Licensing requirements for health and safety, developed a safe and engaging in person preschool program. Class size was reduced to twelve children in an environment that supports social distancing and routine cleaning. Upon arrival, each child participates in a temperature check and a daily family health survey. Each child is provided with personal learning materials and is required to wear a mask. Our preschool also provides a virtual model for families who prefer at home instruction.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Oka provides instruction in visual and performing arts through various modes. Our weekly music program provides hands-on music interactions and while developing an overall musical arts awareness and appreciation. Students in third through fifth grade have the opportunity to participate in an after school band and orchestra program. In our current hybrid model, students have been able to access instrumental and music lessons virtually. Our PTO also enhances student knowledge and interest in music by providing experiences with the Johnny Yeiser Music Program, Philharmonic Society and Brummitt-Taylor Music Listening Program.

Historical artwork knowledge is developed through our Art Masters and Fibo Arts programs that focus on the history and impact of artists and their creative techniques. Each class is given the opportunity to practice these techniques with a variety of mediums to create a piece inspired by each artist. Performing arts instruction is embedded with student participation in our Walk Through History programs, Readers Theater and grade level plays. All students participate in performances that align with grade level standards in the areas of history and science.

Our staff believes that the library should be an accessible resource and inspiration to student learning. Our librarian developed a virtual library to support student learning and exposure throughout this year's unique operating restrictions. All students were able to select, receive and return books, in addition to weekly live virtual interactions. Students participated in book talks, story time and lessons connected to the instruction

taking place in their classroom.

Oka's physical education curriculum and FVSD Health and Wellness Policy is designed to help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to adopt a physically active and healthy lifestyle both at school and at home. All students receive weekly physical education instruction and participate in organized team sports, games and individual physical activities during recess. Activities are currently rotated so all students can participate while following safety guidelines.

To support the success of our hybrid instructional model, all students have been provided with their own device, and exposure to various online programs and communication tools to enhance their learning and growth. The children have learned to navigate programs such as Google Suite, Zoom, Flipgrid, Kahoot, IXL, and more. This exposure and past participation in school wide Bitscouts Coding and Lego Robotics has established a knowledge of coding, computer programming and robotic model design and creation. These experiences highlight teamwork, brainstorming, analytics, cause and effect, creativity and communication.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

Oka Elementary School is committed to providing students with an effective, high-quality core instructional program utilizing methods that support the diverse needs of all students. We believe in the philosophy that there is no single factor more critical to ensuring high levels of learning for all students than the delivery of "best" first instruction by highly-skilled teachers. This belief is especially the case for students from low-income backgrounds (LI), English learners (ELs), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and students facing the myriad of challenges associated with being identified as Homeless or Foster Youth. Oka and our district allocate significant funds for professional development, coaching, collaboration, instructional observations, and training in the District's Signature Practices.

Our staff is dedicated to providing differentiated instruction by focusing on the specific strengths and needs of each student as identified through progress monitoring, formative and summative assessments, student conferring, and teacher observations. Some concrete examples include: Fountas & Pinnell reading assessments and CGI individual problem solving assessments. These individualized assessments provide a window into each student's true understanding of concepts, their strengths and unique needs. Oka has established consistent opportunities for teachers to meet in professional learning communities to analyze assessment data, evaluate student data, determine student needs, create flexible groups, and develop intentional instruction and focused interventions to successfully meet the needs of all of our students.

Students identified performing below grade level in reading and math are provided with support using the tenets of Balanced Literacy and CGI. Teachers develop deeper knowledge and provide targeted practice using leveled libraries, number sets, strategy lessons and individual student conferencing and goal setting. Oka has also established an effective leveled literacy intervention program to improve achievement of struggling readers. Reading specialists lead small groups through intentional, engaging and systematic designed lessons to address unique needs and strengthen confidence.

Oka's entire staff works closely to effectively close the achievement gap for our Students with Disabilities. Together, we identify accommodations or modifications that ensure students are successful. Our Resource Specialist pushes into classrooms to provide small group instruction that supports the core curriculum. Supplemental resources are used, including Phonics for Reading and Spire. Students with mild to moderate disabilities are in Special Day Class (SDC) programs taught by highly trained educators. SDC students are included in the general education setting each day to promote social interaction with peers and to provide access to the core curriculum. Specialists utilize a variety of adaptive technology tools and programs such as Spire, Phonics for Reading,

Orton Gillingham practices, as well as adapted practices of CGI and Balanced Literacy. All of these instructional practices serve to meet the individual identified needs of each student, based on their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and help to close the achievement gap. English learner, migrant and homeless student groups do not represent a significant group at Oka and are served in small settings that meet each student's individual needs.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Our Wolfpack Way school-wide citizenship and character development program is based on the three essential principles of: Respect, Responsibility and Safety. These principles are the foundation of our monthly targeted character trait education activities. Teachers incorporate character education through specific read-aloud books, student role playing scenarios, and interactive video lessons focused on cooperation, integrity, initiative, perseverance, compassion, and having a positive attitude. Students are encouraged and praised for demonstrating these traits throughout the year during virtual and in-person school assemblies, district award assemblies, morning announcements, principal and teacher newsletters, and staff members' personal interactions with students. These efforts create a positive environment where character education is a valued and an integral part of our instructional program.

In response to this challenging academic year, additional social-emotional programs have been put in place to assist students in their social-emotional wellness and to address their essential needs. After-school student groups, both virtual and in-person, led by our school psychologists, have been built to assist students with strategies to help them persevere and succeed in school while building social connections with peers who are experiencing similar challenges. These groups have provided students opportunities to ask questions relating to recent challenging events in our nation. Counseling and psychological support is available on an as needed basis to any student experiencing concerns or distress. Teachers have also been provided with additional professional development opportunities focused on social-emotional health and responding to current events and have incorporated additional lessons, activities, and resources into instructional plans to spark conversations among students and promote empathy for others.

Oka's mission and highest priority is for all students to recognize, demonstrate, and appreciate the value of becoming respectful, responsible, compassionate citizens, while maintaining high academic rigor for all students. This year, we have incorporated a variety of activities that are geared towards making our educational process more engaging. We encouraged and inspired reading through our school wide Read-a-Thon, student spirit dress up days and a virtual assembly where our student's written work came to life through a theatrical presentation from the Imagination Machine Company. Students were also able to attend several virtual field trips put on by various organizations, such as the Ocean Institute, relating to topics they are currently studying in the areas of science and social studies.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

A number of effective practices are used to communicate with and engage stakeholders to support student achievement and overall school success. Parents receive consistent communication through classroom and school wide newsletters and our various virtual platforms. Our school website, as well as our social media platforms, highlight upcoming events, parent training opportunities, interactive digital resources, student accomplishments, and strategies that support learning, both at school and at home. Community outreach in our local periodical, School News, allows us access to business and community resources that aid in supporting our school improvement efforts.

In our traditional model, families are highly encouraged to become actively involved in their child's education by volunteering at the school, participating in school activities, and joining school committees. Parents are invited to serve on our School Site Council and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) to support school-wide programs that enrich and improve the lives of children. The PTO has developed community partnerships with local businesses to provide funds to enhance our school programs and purchase additional technology and educational resources.

Collaboration is also promoted by providing opportunities to participate in activities that cultivate student learning and success. In addition to our Back-to-School Night activities, parent orientation sessions, and parent/teacher conferences, teachers meet regularly with parents before and after school, as well as through online platforms during our hybrid instructional period, to discuss strategies that can be used to support

student academic and social-emotional needs. If greater concerns arise, whether they be academic or behavioral, parents are promptly engaged in our tiered response system for intervention support that allows parents to partner with our Student Study Team. This team is designed to provide specific interventions and supports to fit the individualized needs of the student and includes the site administrator, school psychologist, speech therapist, education specialist, and classroom teachers. Together, with the input of parents, a specific support plan can be designed to help provide the student with additional assistance to improve their academic success.

Another effective strategy that is used to directly impact engagement has been our Oka Family Nights and parent education opportunities. Oka Family Night opportunities have been used to build a connection between student learning in the classroom to the home environment. This year, parent education sessions were offered virtually in the areas of social-emotional support, social media parental awareness, and encouraging student engagement while in our distance learning and hybrid instructional model.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Oka's instructional leaders strongly believe that highly skilled teachers are developed in a supportive, inclusive and positive environment. The challenge of transitioning to distance learning and our current hybrid model required a true focus on our Oka staff core values of: High Expectations, Be a Learner, Be a Good Teammate and All Kids. Our Oka leadership team worked closely to develop consistent and open communication to share needs, concerns and ideas. The staff was provided with daily updates, weekly staff and grade level meetings, and a live online platform for questions and sharing of ideas. This consistent and intimate communication provided teachers with the opportunities to share, brainstorm and work through our challenges as a team. Together, we established the tools, programs and supports needed to provide our children with the opportunities to thrive, both in and outside of the classroom. Individual strengths or areas of expertise were highlighted and nurtured into opportunities to lead. The focus was to create a safe environment where teachers were mentored through opportunities of growth and encouraged to take risks in their learning. All efforts were met with appreciation, understanding and grace.

While incorporating new programs and technology strategies, it was a priority to stay committed to our district signature practices and our work with the Cotsen for the Art of Teaching Foundation fellowship program, in the areas of mathematics-Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) and Balanced Literacy- Readers and Writers Workshop. Teachers were provided with the opportunity to continue our established professional development relationship with Joan Case to learn new ways to implement CGI routines, analyze student thinking and identify current levels of understanding within our new instructional models. Transitioning our Readers and Writers Workshop instruction was supported with continued professional development with Kristi Mraz. Teachers received relevant, specific, grade level and individual support and strategies to implement our workshop models virtually. Mraz also provided professional development in the area of social emotional learning focused on how to support, inspire and connect with children during this unprecedented time. Our pre-established relationships with the presenters and the Cotsen Alumni collaborative network strengthened our sustainability work in both of these areas. Teachers were given endless encouragement to take care of themselves as they led our students through a pandemic.

### **4. School Leadership:**

The Fountain Valley School District strongly believes in the power of school-based leadership and decision-making. For the last several years, Oka has been dedicated to the development of a cohesive leadership team that drives all reform efforts. Lencioni (2012) argues that the development of a cohesive leadership team is one of the most important things a school can do to build organizational health, which is largely regarded as a foundational structure to ensure a highly effective culture.

Oka's leadership team is committed to developing and implementing a healthy culture, consistent and effective instructional practices, a guaranteed and viable curriculum and a commitment to ongoing improvement. The leadership team meets monthly to discuss current improvement efforts and reflect upon progress made. Structurally, there is a grade level representative from each grade (K-5), as well as the inclusion of two education specialists who work with students with special needs. This contributes to

planning that benefits all grade levels. One example of how our team has driven instructional improvement, has been with the implementation of balanced literacy, one of our district's signature practices. To begin, our team worked together to make the decision to implement Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) reading assessments. The commitment by our team and our staff to deliver a highly impactful reading program was founded in the philosophy that to, "teach your kids, you have to know your kids." The F&P reading assessment system allowed each of our teachers to have a common frame to understand the reading skills each student already possessed, and which skills were developmentally appropriate to be taught next. Once we knew our students, our leadership team met to look at reading gaps and select the best professional development opportunities our teachers needed to provide a high quality balanced literacy instruction. Our work in balanced literacy began over four years ago, and it continues to be a priority today.

While COVID19 has profoundly impacted our school, our school reopened for in-person hybrid instruction on September 22, 2020. Our district leadership played a large role in implementing many of the components to a successful reopening. The Oka leadership team served as a support and inspiration for our staff throughout this challenging process. Their dedication has kept the staff's focus on student and on planning our effective instructional programs for when we return to our traditional model.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Oka staff has diligently worked to ensure that equity and access are provided to all students, staff, and families through various strategies. We strived to incorporate inclusivity into our school environment by developing schoolwide expectations. Students are guided by specific expectations that promote Respect, Responsibility, and Safety, known as, "The Wolfpack Way." This matrix of behavior expectations is visible across the Oka campus, and is utilized by all staff in helping promote consistency in messaging and communication, toward furthering student successes and positive behavior towards others on a daily basis. In addition, our "Values in Action" program, which has been part of Oka for multiple decades, is fully integrated into the campus, with the seven core values emphasized throughout each school year. The core values are Integrity, Respect, Cooperation, Perseverance, Compassion, Initiative, and a Positive Mental Attitude. We recognize and honor students who exemplify these core values and the ideas driven by The Wolfpack Way during our morning announcements, at our school wide weekly Friday Flag assemblies, in our parent newsletters, and through daily staff and student interactions. These efforts are especially meaningful for students, as it helps to create a trusting and positive personal connection, not only with their classroom teacher but with the rest of the school community. When a child enters our school, they become part of our Wolfpack family that loves and supports one another unconditionally. Our school mission is to encourage the values that support inclusivity not only on our school campus but in our community as well.

Along with our positive and inclusive school-wide expectations, our site has received several generous grants, from our local Huntington Beach Assistance League and the Cotsen Alumni Foundation, to purchase various picture books around the themes of cultural diversity and under-represented groups. These relevant books provide students with the opportunity to connect with and relate to the experiences of diverse characters, helping to strengthen empathy and compassion for others. Teachers also incorporate culturally diverse and current event awareness and appreciation through the use of resources such as, Time for Kids magazines, Scholastic News magazines and the online resource of NewsELA. These texts and daily features of different topics highlighting current events, history, science, cultural holidays, and more are also incorporated into our online library virtual platform for families and students to access at home.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Although Oka Elementary has employed a variety of high impact strategies over the years, the implementation of Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) has resulted in some of the most significant outcomes for students. According to Carpenter, et al. (2015) CGI is a math philosophy that places a heavy emphasis on number sense, problem types, mathematical thinking and reasoning, questioning strategies and student dialogue.

The implementation of this practice was a joint effort between the district and school site. In 2015, our primary grade teachers began voluntary CGI training in the evenings with well-respected trainer, Teri Malpass. The following year, our upper grade teachers were trained and together our staff committed to reworking the way(s) in which we taught math. During this time, the district hired two Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) to support CGI practices within the classroom. From this period forward, TOSAs led the CGI charge in Fountain Valley and at Oka, providing training, small group coaching, lesson plan samples, demonstration lessons, and any other support needed for teachers to implement CGI effectively. Additionally, Oka Elementary was selected by the Cotsen Foundation to participate in their two year program mentorship and training program. Six Oka teachers were selected to participate in this effort as fellows, with one additional teacher who was selected as a mentor. This mentorship program helped to significantly improve the implementation of CGI in the school, especially at the upper grade levels. We believe the math gains experienced by our school on CAASPP, is a direct result of our work and dedication to implement CGI strategies in all classrooms.

When COVID-19 forced the closure of schools in March 2020, our education system experienced significant challenges to maintain routines and quality instructional practices. The Oka staff went to great efforts to refine and include CGI strategies through distance learning and we continued to layer in more of our instructional practices as we transitioned into our hybrid in person model. Due to our current restrictions created by social distancing and time constraints our CGI instruction has changed. However, we can unequivocally state that CGI is a part of who we are as a school, and we will continue these efforts in the years to come. We are always working to improve what we do and how we do it for the benefit of all children.