

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Orinda Intermediate School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 80 Ivy Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Orinda State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 94563-4244

County Contra Costa County

Telephone (925) 258-3090 Fax (925) 631-7985

Web site/URL https://ois-orinda-ca.schoolloop.com E-mail swayne@orinda.k12.ca.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\* Aida Glimme Ms. E-mail aglimme@orinda.k12.ca.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Orinda Union School District Tel. (925) 254-4901

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 Carol Brown Ms.  
(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 signatures 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 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. 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.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for 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 in the school as of October 1, 2021 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	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	128	134	262
7	148	135	283
8	128	151	279
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	404	420	824

\*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):
- 0.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 29.7 % Asian
  - 1.3 % Black or African American
  - 6.2 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 62 % White
  - 0 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 2%

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, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	20
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	824
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Cantonese, German, Greek, Japanese, Farsi, Romanian, Russian, Korean, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Turkish, Vietnamese, French, Portuguese, Punjabi

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
2 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %

Total number students who qualify: 9

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 10 %  
86 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 with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <u>0</u> Autism                   | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>1</u> Deafness                 | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>13</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>48</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>4</u> Developmental Delay      | <u>45</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>11</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>9</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>14</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	47
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	96%	97%	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 2021.

<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 mission of Orinda Intermediate School (OIS) is to promote academic excellence, to encourage self-reliance, and to foster a sense of belonging to each and every student. Our shared vision is one in which every student feels challenged, motivated, and accepts personal responsibility as a member of the school and wider community. OIS is currently in the process of revising our mission statement to reflect the fundamental purpose of the work we do every day. The new statement will also align with our district's mission statement that is also currently under a review and revision process.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

Nondiscrimination/Harassment

OIS desires to provide a safe school environment that allows all students equal access and opportunities in the district's academic and other educational support programs, services, and activities. At any district school or school activity, unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying of any student based on the student's actual race, color, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, religion, marital or parental status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression; the perception of one or more of such characteristics, or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics is prohibited per School Board policy 5145.3

Prohibited discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying includes physical, verbal, nonverbal, or written conduct based on one of the categories listed above that is so severe and pervasive that it affects a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program or activity; creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile, or offensive educational environment; has the effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with a student's academic performance; or otherwise adversely affects a student's educational opportunities.

OIS also prohibits any form of retaliation against any student who files a complaint or report regarding an incident of discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

Students who engage in discrimination, harassment, intimidation, bullying, or retaliation in violation of law, Board policy, or administrative regulation shall be subject to appropriate discipline, up to and including counseling, suspension, and/or expulsion. Any employee who permits or engages in prohibited discrimination, harassment, intimidation, bullying, or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Any student who feels that he/she has been subjected to discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying should immediately contact the Coordinator (Director of Curriculum and Instruction), the principal, or any other staff member. In addition, any student who observes any such incident should report the incident to the Coordinator or principal, whether or not the victim files a complaint, in accordance with the district's uniform complaint procedures specified in AR 1312.3- Uniform Complaint Procedures.

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

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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Orinda Intermediate School (OIS) is located in a small Bay Area city just east of Berkeley. As one drives through the Caldecott Tunnel, along Moraga Way, and up the driveway to OIS, the landscape is breathtakingly serene. Though just a stone's throw from the activity of a prestigious university and the bustle of the grand city of Oakland, Orinda has maintained its quaint character as its size renders it too small for the typical suburban sprawl. This idyllic locale has allowed Orinda's middle schoolers to flourish despite the challenges that adolescents face in today's complicated world. Orinda Intermediate School exists to support the cultural competence and the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth of students to prepare them to participate as members of a global community beyond the 13-mile radius of their town. The emphasis on lifelong learning and personal growth drives the work we do.

Orinda is a community that prioritizes education and recognizes the future opportunities afforded to those with a strong foundation in learning. Our families are supportive and involved, and our students thrive as a result of the partnership between the community and the schools. Orinda Intermediate School endeavors to meet the expectations of our students' parents and guardians, who themselves are highly educated, while simultaneously implementing researched best practices and encouraging a growth mindset. At times, it is necessary to stay the course despite pushback from well-meaning community members who may be resistant to change. Conversely, there are times that we use the invaluable input from stakeholders to reexamine a programmatic decision or practice. This continued dialogue has truly enabled OIS to grow as a community of learners who reflect, examine, and evaluate.

The concept of college and career readiness, as outlined in the Common Core State Standards, is one that continues to inform our professional development plan for our teaching staff. Our goal is to prepare our students by furnishing them with the essential skills that will allow for unfettered future success. These skills, aptly known as the 21st Century Learning Skills, include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, and are supported across the curriculum at OIS. Our pedagogical practices encourage exploration, risk-taking, and valuing mistakes as opportunities for growth. Our educators are reflective practitioners who collaborate as part of a professional learning community to ensure high levels of achievement for every student. They design student-centered lessons aimed to support all learners, incorporating the tenets of Project Based Learning (PBL) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Our teachers value diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and understand the importance of incorporating bias-resistant and culturally-responsive practices to ensure access to the curriculum for all of our students.

Perhaps the most important measure of success is the mental well-being of our student population. Adolescence is a notoriously challenging time, and the COVID-19 pandemic did nothing to assuage this. At OIS, our students have an additional burden that is the paradox of living in a community such as ours: the pressure that comes with such a tremendous level of academic achievement. From an early age, students in Orinda develop goals and are aware of college admission processes and familial expectations for life after high school. Thus, a top priority for OIS is to ensure that our students have the opportunity to fully enjoy their experiences and learn how to manage the inevitable stressors in their lives.

One programmatic way that we foster the social-emotional growth of our young learners is through the many elective offerings that provide the necessary "down time" during which students can create, engage, and have fun. We know that school connectedness is key to student success, particularly during adolescence. Thus, we have introduced activities to increase student involvement and enhance the overall middle school experience. Our physical education teachers, in addition to planning challenging, interactive, and dynamic PE lessons for students, organize and conduct a popular intramural sports program during lunchtime. Teachers and counselors also sponsor lunchtime clubs, such as the green team, the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), creativity club, and self-care club. In addition to a concerted effort to provide an engaging and enriching experience throughout the school day, OIS has a robust after-school program for students consisting of competitive and skill-building sports, musical theater, math club (MATHCOUNTS), and a technology leadership club (Bulldog MOUSE Squad).

Another critical component of our educational program that is designed specifically to support the social-

emotional well-being and character development of our students is the Advisory period that we built into our modified block schedule. In addition to covering mandated topics, such as sexual harassment and suicide prevention and awareness, Advisory has become a weekly communication to promote wellness, character education, and self- reflection. The OIS counselors and administrators typically record the lessons that teachers facilitate with their classes. The structure of the Advisory period was born from necessity during distance learning but has proved to be an effective method of relaying important information.

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

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

#### **1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas:**

The notion that all students can and should achieve at high levels, thriving in all capacities, is behind every curricular and programmatic decision made at Orinda Intermediate School. Simply put, we seek to answer the question “Is it best for students?” when evaluating a practice, process, or program. Educators at OIS value the opportunity to work collaboratively, in grade level and department teams, to evaluate student work and analyze assessment data, discuss instructional strategies, and share best practices to ensure high levels of learning for all students. Weekly common planning time (CPT), which allows teachers to build their communities of practice in a spirit of continuous improvement, has been a structure in place at OIS for well over a decade.

In January 2020, eight teachers and two administrators from Orinda Intermediate School attended Solution Tree's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Summit in Phoenix, Arizona, and returned invigorated and excited about bringing the collaborative work to the next level. The PLC approach, which is defined as the "ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve," has sharpened our focus and reminded us of our core values. We know the importance of identifying the essential standards, creating a scope and sequence for each curricular area, and developing common assessments by which we can measure student learning. We recognize that our teachers, through their creativity, individual strengths, willingness to grow, and consummate professionalism, hold the keys to improving student outcomes across our school site. Therefore, we support their continued growth with a commitment to systematic professional development.

The efforts of every instructional team at Orinda Intermediate School are centered around the following four questions that are the basis for the PLC work: What do we want our students to know and learn? How will we know if they have learned? What will we do if they have not learned? What will we do if they already know it?

#### **1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Orinda Intermediate School began a partnership with Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) over a decade ago, adopting the workshop model for teaching literacy. At that time, our goal was to build upon the skills developed through reading and writing workshops in the elementary schools in order to meet the rigorous demands of the Common Core State Standards.

TCRWP places emphasis on strategies and research-based methods of instruction that have been proven effective, such as matching students to texts that are at their individual reading levels, conferring with students about their reading and writing, using mentor texts in mini-lessons to teach essential skills, and creating environments to promote learning.

Our work with TCRWP has consisted of training and coaching by experienced staff developers for all of our Core (language arts and history) teachers, special education teachers, and administrators, as well as participation in the project's weeklong summer institutes for several of our teachers. Because of our involvement with TCRWP, instructional practices at Orinda Intermediate School have been closely aligned to the state standards since 2010, when we became a project school. Our teachers have continued to grow their practices through trainings and conference attendance in order to improve student outcomes. During the pandemic, through the period of distance learning and later hybrid instruction, our teachers attended online sessions that were offered.

Students at every level are taught to read with critical eyes and to work collaboratively to make sense of

what they are reading. Our readers work in partnerships or book clubs, and through accountable talk, learn to further their thinking and dive deeply into complex texts, supporting their ideas with evidence. As writers, our students are learning to live what TCRWP calls the “writerly life,” generating and expounding ideas and responding to literature in their journals.

Our Core teachers assess students in reading with the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) reading levels in order to gain evidence of student learning and to make informed curricular decisions, revising lessons to meet individual student needs. Teachers at all three grade levels have collaborated to create common on-demand writing assessments in the three types of writing—narrative, informational, and opinion—and developed standards-based rubrics for scoring the assessments. The assessments provide valuable feedback with regard to instruction and give students the opportunity to show what they have learned. Teachers are given release time to evaluate the data and look for trends. In this way, we continue to promote a collective responsibility for the learning of all students across our school site.

### **1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The transformative shift that has occurred in our mathematics program has, without a doubt, been the most noteworthy effort of the past few years at Orinda Intermediate School. The two-pronged approach has focused directly on implementing the principles of the PLC, with educators working together to best meet the needs of our middle school students.

In true collaboration, teachers in our math department worked with site administrators, the district’s math coach and director of curriculum, and elementary level teachers in the spring of 2019 to develop a placement process for incoming sixth graders to ensure that students are placed appropriately as they matriculate at OIS. With the shift to the Common Core years ago, OIS created two pathways for math instruction: one is the typical grade level progression and the other is an accelerated progression that compacts four years of curricula into the three middle school grades. Despite our initial plan to provide differentiation within each grade level course, we soon realized that our community of high achievers required a more systematic approach to set them up for success. After having tried various methods for determining placement on one of the two pathways, we knew it was time to create a better process—one that uses multiple measures to provide as comprehensive a portrait as possible about our incoming math learners. Among the indicators on the placement rubric are standardized test scores, trimester assessment scores, readiness assessments, and teacher input regarding characteristics of the student as a math learner. Families are given an opportunity to appeal the placement decision with input, and if deemed appropriate, students may be placed in an accelerated course on monitor. Communication has been the single most important factor in the continued success of the new placement process.

With several new teachers and a pandemic that significantly altered the learning landscape over the past two years, the time was right to concentrate our efforts around the PLC work with our math department. At the start of the 2020-21 school year, our teachers began working directly with a renowned staff developer from Solution Tree, focusing on identifying the essential standards, determining ways to effectively teach and assess remotely, and creating common assessments to measure student learning across the school.

At the start of this school year, the department made the critical decision to change its grading practices to accurately reflect student growth and address the inequities associated with traditional methods of grading. Rather than reporting on subjectively interpreted behaviors such as effort or participation, teachers now employ practices that focus primarily on evaluating student progress toward mastery of the content standards. Simply put, students’ grades are based almost entirely on assessments. This emphasis on achievement eliminates ambiguity and aligns with the notion that all students are capable of meeting academic standards. Furthermore, this practice fully supports the growth mindset that we have espoused at OIS.

Students are encouraged to take test retakes or redo projects if they were not able to demonstrate mastery on the initial assessment. Though the effort for our teachers to implement these changes has been significant, the payoff has been huge for our math learners.

## **1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Our goal at Orinda Intermediate School is to provide students with access to hands-on, inquiry-based science instruction. Early on in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, before the official adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the teachers in our science department worked with the University of California at Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science (LHS) to investigate the science and engineering practices and gain knowledge of the disciplinary core ideas and the crosscutting concepts. Teachers started by incorporating the science and engineering practices into their curriculum, as these practices fit perfectly with the guided-inquiry approach to teaching science that had allowed for an engaging educational experience for our students. With the implementation of the NGSS, our young scientists continue to work with partners and groups to ask questions, seek solutions, and drive their own learning, using science journals to record their ideas.

Through participation in the BaySci Initiative, our science teachers were able to work with researchers on the leading edge of science education. Our partnership with science educators known for driving innovative best practices allowed our science program to grow through improved leadership, strong curricula, resources, and policies supporting science and the implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards and the National Research Council's Framework for K–12 Science Education. One of BaySci's key elements is capacity-building. Participants became science champions who were "supported to improve and share their own practices, assume leadership roles, and develop their knowledge, skills, and confidence in science to bring back to their schools and/or districts."

The science curriculum at OIS lends itself perfectly to Project Based Learning (PBL). An example of true PBL is our seventh grade Take Action Project (TAP). Our students in all seventh grade science classrooms spend the year generating ideas for problems that will require effective and informed action to solve. They work in partnerships to examine an issue of their choice related to sustainability, environmental science, climate change, resource shortages, or another real-world topic that impacts them. The culminating project is presented to the community either during a science night or other schoolwide event.

## **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Students at Orinda Intermediate School study history/social science in their Core classes. Sixth graders have three periods of Core built into their daily schedules; seventh and eighth graders have two periods of Core classes. The course is designed to integrate the teaching of English language arts with that of history/social science.

One of the key features of our history/social science instruction is the focus on historical thinking as the chief objective. Rather than memorizing facts, students read and investigate primary sources, learn how to analyze multiple points of view, cite evidence from texts, and make claims based on that evidence in writing and speaking. We aim to give our students the skills with which to understand the significance of the past and its relevance to the present and future.

Critical thinking is developed through the use of document-based questions (DBQs) or Mini-Q's that scaffold the process of analyzing texts. Working with the University of California at Berkeley's History-Social Science Project (UCBHSSP), our Core teachers have structured their units around the work of the Historical Thinking Project: Students are taught to establish historical significance, use primary source evidence, identify continuity and change, analyze cause and consequence, take historical perspectives, and understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

As with the literature they make available to students in their classroom libraries, our Core teachers thoughtfully review texts with a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and guide students to do the same. This lens is currently in place as our Core department pilots new textbooks in anticipation of an upcoming adoption. The notion of empowering our young historians through justice-informed instruction is one that motivates our teachers more so than ever before as they prepare their students to be engaged members of an increasingly complex world.

## **1f. For secondary schools:**

The focus on Project Based Learning across the curriculum at Orinda Intermediate School initially accompanied the shift to the Common Core State Standards. With the intent of equipping students with the skills needed for future success, professional development with the Buck Institute for Education centered around teaching content knowledge through authentic learning opportunities that also promote critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication. By creating real-world projects that are relevant to students' lives, teachers have increased engagement and allowed students to develop agency over their learning. They are active participants who collaborate to investigate a complex issue or answer a driving question that has guided their research. They then organize their findings to present to an audience. This method of instruction has resulted in students who are confident, capable, and curious.

In addition to the pedagogical choices that support college and career readiness, our course offerings set students on the road to success as they move to high school. Approximately fifty percent of our students take the accelerated math classes, putting them a year ahead of their typical peers. The same is true for our world language electives of Spanish and French. Students at OIS are given the option of taking two years of a world language so that they can skip the introductory class once they start high school. Other electives, such as leadership, public speaking and debate, computer programming, web design, and video production, further develop the skills that will serve students well as they move on in their schooling and plan for their future professional lives.

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

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

In addition to the core curricular subjects, students in all grades at Orinda Intermediate School participate in physical education (PE) and elective classes. All classes meet four times a week due to our modified block schedule.

Our students enjoy a well-organized PE program that is designed to promote wellness through physical activity, with a focus on muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility. The PE handbook summarizes the goal of the department with its mission statement: “all students will master the necessary movement skills to participate confidently in many different forms of physical activity and strive to be a well-rounded athlete; will demonstrate responsibility, self-advocacy, and appropriate social interaction skills; and will participate in daily physical activity and understand the value of lifetime physical fitness.” The games and activities that our teachers design ensure that students are engaged and having fun while building skills and developing athleticism.

The robust elective program at OIS is designed to enhance our students' educational experience by providing opportunities for exploration and enrichment. The many courses offered allow students to develop and expand their interests while gaining practical experience and preparing them for high school and beyond. Students in sixth grade choose one elective per semester and students in seventh and eighth grades select two electives per semester. Some of our electives, such as world languages or music, are yearlong courses.

Students who opt to begin study of a world language in middle school may take either Spanish or French at OIS. The two-year language course equates to one year of a high school language course. Nearly fifty percent of our students choose this path. Other students choose to take either choral music or one of our instrumental music courses. We offer concert band, string orchestra, and jazz band to students in all three grades.

Visual arts and performing arts are popular electives at OIS, and thus we have expanded our course offerings in these areas over the past few years. Students in all three grade levels may choose from art, sculpture, computer graphics, drama, public speaking and debate, makerspace, woodworking, video

production, and broadcasting. In addition to graphics, we offer web design and computer programming for students who are interested in computers.

Our Leadership/WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) class gives fifty eighth grade leaders the opportunity to serve as mentors to sixth graders as they transition to middle school and throughout the school year. During the summer, prior to the start of school, the WEB leaders host an orientation day for our incoming sixth graders. Through a series of games, activities, lessons, and tours, students build friendships, explain procedures, and dispel myths about middle school. Trained WEB leaders teach lessons in sixth grade classrooms on topics such as cooperation, avoiding rumors, and study skills. WEB leaders connect with sixth graders through planned lunchtime and afterschool activities, as well, and organize fundraisers and spirit days for the entire school.

Peer mentoring is another coveted elective as seventh and eighth grade students opt to work with students in our inclusion class. Peer mentors facilitate social interaction and offer support with academics when appropriate. The program is one that is equally valued by the peer mentors and our students in the inclusion class as both parties benefit from the interactions and the opportunity to build interpersonal skills.

### **3. Academic Supports**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level:**

A critical question we utilize to ensure that all students are meeting grade level standards is geared toward intervention: What will we do if students have not learned the content we have taught them? With this question as an imperative part of the collective review of assessment data and the subsequent collaborative planning, teachers and staff design strategies for supporting our underperforming students.

Tier 1 intervention occurs through differentiation in each classroom, and includes strategic grouping, reteaching, and individualized instruction with methods such as conferencing in reading and writing workshops. Our teachers, counselors, and administrators communicate regularly, and the counselors monitor progress for our struggling learners. Support personnel meet to discuss and develop plans of action for identified students, and student study team meetings are scheduled when deemed necessary.

Thus far, with the changes implemented in math, we have seen evidence of improvement for our students who have historically performed below grade level. Students who are not able to demonstrate mastery the first time they attempt to do so, are given the opportunity to learn the material and retake the assessment. This has proved to be an effective way to accurately identify students who continue to struggle. For these students, we have implemented Tier 2 intervention with a before-school program that is taught collaboratively by a math teacher and a special education teacher.

Though teachers in our special education department were initially hesitant about the revised grading policy in math, they are now ardently in favor of the practice as they have seen evidence of student learning. In addition, as many of our students in special education had not always met grade level standards in mathematics, we have noted an increased sense of efficacy and accomplishment as they master the content.

In the future, our goal is to revise the current bell schedule so as to increase the time within the school day for Tier 2 intervention. Our intent is to increase the Advisory time from once to twice per week, creating an "academy" period for both intervention and extension opportunities.

#### **3b. Students performing above grade level:**

Because so many of our students at Orinda Intermediate School perform above grade level, our teachers understand that it is imperative to craft lessons and assessments that allow for true differentiation.

Our Core teachers use reading assessments to match students to texts and on-demand writing assessments to determine areas of focus for workshop mini-lessons. Teachers in every department incorporate elements of Project Based Learning, which, by nature, allows for differentiation. Students are able to take agency of

their learning and are encouraged to explore, create, and push their thinking to new levels. This type of engagement is particularly important for our students who are high flyers.

In math, in addition to the accelerated pathway, students are given extension opportunities within the classroom. Students are challenged with multi-level problems that require high levels of thinking, such as Mathematics Assessment Resource Service (MARS) tasks. For the students who are true outliers, "double acceleration" is an option. Though it is not common, we currently have approximately a dozen students at each grade level who fall into this category, taking the accelerated course that is one grade level above.

Through participation in the elective offerings that are considered academic electives, such as Spanish, French, public speaking and debate, computer programming, and web design, many of our high performing students are further challenged to reach higher levels of learning.

### **3c. Special education:**

For the current school year, approximately eleven percent of Orinda Intermediate students receive special education services with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Our students with IEPs are enrolled in one period of instructional support (ISP), during which time our special education teachers provide specialized academic instruction and work on IEP goals. Our ISP classes are small, consisting generally of three to six students, allowing for focused and personalized attention. Our students with moderate to severe learning challenges are supported through our inclusion program, attending general education classes with peer mentors to support participation in the least restrictive environment. All special education classes have special services assistants to provide additional adult support for students. In addition to specialized academic instruction, some of our students in special education receive services from our speech and language pathologist, occupational therapist, behavior specialist, adaptive PE teacher, or our school psychologist.

Approximately nine percent of students at OIS qualify for accommodations with a 504 Plan. Though the students with 504s do not require an extra class period of instructional support in order to access the curriculum, they do require accommodations in order to achieve at their highest level. That is to say, the 504 plans reduce the possibility of inequities due to challenges that only certain students may face.

Our most recent assessment data indicates a trend that has been consistent for over a decade: our students in special education continue to underperform in comparison to their peers in general education. Thus, through researched methods of differentiated instruction, assessment retakes, and systematic review and progress monitoring, our goal is to eliminate this achievement gap so that truly all of our students are meeting or exceeding the standards.

### **3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

Orinda Intermediate currently has two students who qualify as English Language Learners. Both receive before-school instruction from the district's EL specialist. Because our numbers of English Language Learners is so small, our students typically make tremendous growth in a short amount of time. The specialist provides a personalized program for each student and serves as a liaison, communicating with general education teachers and parents to support our students.

### **3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant, homeless), if a special program or intervention is offered:**

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

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

In reviewing data from the most recent administration of the California Healthy Kids Survey to all seventh graders at Orinda Intermediate School, we confirmed suspicions that our students were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. Eighteen percent of respondents reported chronic sadness and hopelessness. The importance of school connectedness during adolescence cannot be overstated. During the 2020-21 school year, several OIS families reached out to share the hardships they faced at home with the shutdown and distance learning, and when we were able to bring our students back to campus in a hybrid model, the outcome was monumental. Though our hybrid schedule greatly reduced the number of student contacts and modified the types of classroom activities, the positive effects of live instruction and social interaction were immediate.

We had worked swiftly as a school site and district to distribute devices and textbooks for families at the start of distance learning in August 2020. In order to ensure the highest level of student engagement given the circumstances, all teachers had received training in best Zoom practices and modified student schedules maintained the ever-so-important elective classes. PE classes were the only courses offered asynchronously, and students were assigned daily fitness activities.

A positive programmatic outcome from the 2020-21 school year was the creation of the weekly Advisory sessions that were pushed out remotely during students' Zoom meetings. This change in our Advisory allowed for the delivery of critical topics for our middle schoolers, including lessons for organization and study skills, character education, social emotional learning, and other important developmental competencies. This school year, we maintained the successful structure of our Advisory lessons, though some, such as the mandated suicide prevention and awareness trainings, were conducted in person, with counselors visiting classrooms to deliver the content.

The return to a more typical OIS experience was a welcome one at the start of the 2021-22 school year. Our students and staff returned refreshed and excited, and our always supportive Parents' Club was determined to help support the programs and activities that had been canceled or postponed the previous year. Some of the reinstated programs include Bulldog Sports, Bulldog Theater, WEB Day and other events, Others First, intramural sports, and lunchtime clubs. Our Leadership/WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) elective has further enhanced the overall feel of campus life this year through their many fundraising efforts, spirit days and activities, and afterschool events.

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

The parent community at Orinda Intermediate School has been an integral component of our success. Both financially and through volunteerism, our families support our initiatives and ensure the continued achievement of our students. With California ranking 44th in the nation in per student funding for education and Orinda schools receiving among the lowest levels of funding in the state, the support of the Orinda Intermediate School Parents' Club (OISPC) and the Orinda Network for Education (ONE) is vital in sustaining the programs and people that make OIS an exceptional learning environment. Through the OISPC and our School Site Coordinating Council (SSCC), the parents and guardians of our students help us realize our vision and achieve the goals we have set forth for our community of learners. The funds raised directly support academic and elective programs, library, technology initiatives, counseling team, and afterschool programs.

On a rotating basis, scores of parent volunteers give their time to serve brunch and lunch to students through our Bulldog Kennel, a program that operates through a partnership with a local restaurateur. In addition, parent volunteers run our community service program, Others First. Through this program, students can sign up to volunteer monthly with charitable organizations throughout the Bay Area. The mission of Others First has included the goal of building a supportive school community by encouraging altruism, kindness, and humanitarianism, involving and connecting students to other students, adults, and non-profit organizations,

and providing all students with opportunities for success by building self-esteem, and teaching leadership, responsibility and citizenship. Parent volunteers also give their time to the choral and instrumental music programs, competitive debate team, library services, afterschool sports and theater programs, emergency preparedness, Diverse Abilities Awareness Week, WEB Day, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Club, staff appreciation and hospitality, and our end-of-year eighth grade promotion activities. Without this level of commitment, many of these cherished components of the educational experience at OIS would suffer tremendously.

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

When considering student achievement, the teaching staff at Orinda Intermediate School is the single most important factor. We know that the best way to improve outcomes for students is by continually supporting teacher learning through a methodical approach to professional development. Over the past several years, OIS has partnered with expert staff developers from the Lawrence Hall of Science, the Buck Institute, Columbia University's Teachers College, Solution Tree, Contra Costa County Office of Education, and others. OIS teachers also attend conferences or workshops offsite on their own or with department colleagues, such as the annual California Mathematics Council's conference in Asilomar.

An essential key to the success of the PLC implementation is time for collaboration. Currently, our modified block schedule allows for common planning time (CPT) every Wednesday morning as students have a late start of 9:25 a.m. Acknowledging that this is not ample for the type of work required when engaging in the cycle of inquiry, departments receive compensation or release time when possible. One of the ways in which we hope to address the amount of work and the extra time required is to modify our bell schedule to incorporate more collaboration time for teachers while also building in additional time for student intervention and extension.

Our teachers are consummate professionals whose valuable experience, knowledge, and expertise guide many of the decisions that impact our students. The culture that we strive to cultivate at OIS is one that invites participation and input from all members of our teaching community, not just those who are involved with our Instructional Council and Site Council. During the 2020-21 school year, teacher input was invaluable for determining the distance learning schedule and later the many iterations of our hybrid schedule. Before implementing any schedule changes, we surveyed teachers and shared the results, ensuring that most were in favor. This practice of soliciting feedback from teachers, and in many cases all stakeholders, is one that is paramount.

Our hardworking and dedicated educators are highly valued and recognized by our community. The OIS Parents' Club has been steadfast in consistently providing monthly lunches for teachers and staff to show appreciation and support. In addition, for one week out of every school year, the PC provides treats, cards, and other small tokens during Teacher Appreciation Week.

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

The leadership philosophy of Orinda Intermediate School is one of shared leadership that values collaboration and collective responsibility. Educational leaders engage in a cycle of inquiry for the purpose of continuous improvement in order to determine the best ways to support students in all facets of middle school life. The administration is composed of a principal and an associate principal. In addition, though not part of the leadership team per se, Orinda Intermediate School has counselors who support the efforts of the administration. Prior to this school year, OIS had always employed two full-time counselors. In response to the anticipated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our students' mental health and socio-emotional well-being, our district and school board supported the addition of another full-time counselor, thereby increasing our team to three. The OIS counselors, in collaboration with administrators, create and present our Advisory sessions, meet with students to offer support and guidance, and share knowledge with families and staff about germane topics. This team meets weekly to review data from surveys and observations, discuss issues pertaining to identified students, and evaluate and develop programs to support student growth.

principal and associate principal, the team of eleven members meets monthly. Using the cycle of inquiry model, the Instructional Council identifies an improvement focus, collects, examines, and discusses data, and implements trials or programs to address the focus. The team revisits issues throughout the school year, and often, into the next year. Recently, three Instructional Council members, along with their department colleagues, shared their knowledge and expertise during a district-wide professional development training. Following an opening session that engaged all of the district's teachers in activities designed to understand the facts about our system through evidence of student learning, achievement gaps, and various cultural aspects, OIS teacher leaders created and led sessions on the topics of Project Based Learning, Grading for Equity, and Promoting Student Agency While Encouraging Diversity in Literature.

The OIS Site Coordinating Council (SSCC) is another group that reviews data, gives input and proposals, and supports the implementation of programs designed to address the initiatives outlined in the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). The SSCC is composed of seven staff members, including the principal, associate principal, three teachers, and one non-teaching staff member, and seven parents, including the Parents' Club president, treasurer, vice president of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and a representative from the Orinda Network for Education.

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

The fundamental belief that guides the work we do at Orinda Intermediate School is the notion that all students can achieve at high levels. This philosophy necessitates a constant and continued evaluation of our programming, staffing, and instructional decisions to ensure that our practices are inclusive and that we are serving all students equitably.

When planning units, teachers in all subject areas use a DEI lens to ensure their lessons are culturally relevant and responsive, referring when appropriate to the Social Justice Standards from Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance). Teachers aim to design lessons using a broad range of strategies to differentiate instruction to meet individual learning needs as informed by multiple assessments, when possible, with the goal that students will be able to make connections between the curriculum and their prior knowledge, backgrounds, life experiences, and interests. With PBL, the intent is to promote agency by giving students voice and choice in their learning while teaching the content standards. When planning, teachers examine potential sources of bias, stereotyping, and assumptions about certain groups or cultures. Classroom activities that incorporate Universal Design for Learning ensure that individual learning needs are met.

Systematic professional development has allowed us to offer relevant trainings throughout the years to build capacity with regard to culturally responsive teaching as new teachers have joined our staff. We have partnered with staff developers from Epoch Education, the Anti-Defamation League, and Race-Works for explicit training around equity and inclusion. Additionally, sessions with the BaySci Initiative, Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, Facing History and Ourselves, and the UCB History-Social Science Project have given our teachers tools to think about content development and delivery with a DEI lens.

Programs such as our Diverse Abilities Awareness Week (DAAW), Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, and Advisory, ensure that equity, cultural awareness, and respect are fundamental components of our learning community. When addressing microaggressions or other transgressions, we utilize restorative practices to address harm, encourage growth, and repair relationships when possible in order to build a community of compassion. Our counselors promote self-reflection and a growth mindset to build empathy and promote social emotional learning and positive interpersonal relationships.

In a spirit of continuous improvement, OIS engages in an inquiry approach with regard to cultural competence to push ourselves as educators. We question our own assumptions and biases and check the work we are doing to ensure that we are employing best practices that are democratic, honor diversity, and deliberately and explicitly address inequities.

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

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Orinda Intermediate School is a community of lifelong learners who are inspired to take risks, reflect, and change course if necessary in the spirit of continued cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. This understanding allows educators and students alike to flourish in a safe and supportive environment. We know that when negative feelings such as stress, anxiety, or embarrassment are elevated, the ability to learn is impeded. Just as linguist Stephen Krashen referred to the “affective filter,” or imaginary wall, that rises in the mind and prevents input with regard to language acquisition, the same is true for thinking and learning, in general. People must feel safe, confident, and inspired in order to reach their full potential. Thus, the fundamental philosophy at OIS is one that emphasizes a growth mindset for all members of our learning community. This, above all, has been the most instrumental factor in continued student success.

Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker defined professional learning communities as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.” This notion drives the work we do at OIS to ensure high levels of achievement for all students, which we recognize as our fundamental purpose. We seek to lower the affective filter for our educators and to expand the skills of collaboration and reflection as a habit of practice to increase teacher effectiveness, thereby increasing student growth. We understand that the key to improved learning for students is ongoing job-embedded learning for educators. Through a systematic approach to professional development, we continue to build capacity, and by encouraging collective inquiry into best practices, we have transformed the culture of our school site.

As with any organization, OIS exists to produce improved results over time. As educators and lifelong learners, we regularly examine our systems and always return our focus to our *raison d'être*: our students. With a commitment to continuous improvement, we take collective responsibility in order to achieve the desired outcomes for our learners. When seeking solutions that are aligned to our organizational goals, the answer invariably comes when we come back to our driving question: Is it best for our students?