



Educational Program

The following describe the school's unique design reflecting how Odyssey believes learning best occurs. They are consistent with the school's vision, mission and target population.

Research Base: Odyssey's unique school design begins with a solid research base. The research-based learning theory and thoroughly developed classroom methodologies that Odyssey will draw upon are as follows:

- (1) **Constructivist Learning Theory:** (Brooks and Brooks, 1993) offers the notion and supports Odyssey's interdisciplinary, experiential-based school design acknowledging that learning best occurs when the students derive their own understanding through learning experiences.
- (2) **Multiage Groupings Research:** (Anderson and Pavan, 1993) supports educational environments with two or more grades that allow students the flexibility to progress at their own pace along a continuum of learning. Multi-year relationships between teacher and student provide for deeper knowledge to guide instructional decisions and familiarity with the social-emotional health of a student.
- (3) **Project-based Learning Approach:** (Ronald J. Newell, 2003) provides a means for students to *take charge of their own learning* by actively planning, researching and developing an in-depth study of a topic of interest. Students are responsible for deciding on the topic, what the project will consist of, how to implement the project, and reflection on the project. Students are responsible for deciding what processes they will use to achieve the project, according to their individual learning styles. It is the role of the teacher to guide the students, set expectations, facilitate questions, and encourage students to use multiple intelligences.
- (4) **Theory of Multiple Intelligences:** (Howard Gardner, 1983) acknowledges, "It's not how smart you are it's *how* you are smart," and identifies the different ways to be smart (visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, mathematical/logical, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existentialist). This theory supports Odyssey Charter School's commitment to establishing a learning environment, learning process and educational program that honors individual learning styles and abilities.
- (5) **Emotional Intelligence:** (Goleman, 1995) Emotional literacy is defined as five core facets: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy and self-control (CARES). Social emotional learning provides the platform for learning and the development of self-reflection, and effective problem solving. Emotional Intelligence builds on Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory.
- (6) **Teaching for Understanding Framework:** (Project Zero and Harvard Graduate School of Education) provides four key ideas around which units of study are

developed. These include generative topics (choosing topics that engage student interest and connect readily to other subjects), understanding goals (coherent unit and course goals), performances of understanding (activities that develop and demonstrate student’s understanding), and on-going assessment (improve student performance through continual feedback).

- (7) **California Academic Content Standards:** provide grade-level benchmarks and instructional content for curriculum.
- (8) **Parental Involvement:** When it comes to parental involvement and its powerful influence, the knowledge base is broad and clear. The most comprehensive survey of the research is a series of publications developed by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla: *The Evidence Grows* (1981); *The Evidence Continues to Grow* (1987); and *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* (1995). Citing more than 85 studies, these publications document the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when parents and family members become participants in their children’s education and their lives. All references to “parent” in this Charter may be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in a child’s family life, since other adults – grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, guardians – may carry the primary responsibility for a child’s education, development and well-being.

Learning Components: Odyssey’s unique school design has three interdependent learning components specifically intended to develop independent, life-long learners, who are capable of transferring knowledge and skills, and possess the ability to think critically (Academic Excellence). In addition the components develop character through a global understanding and universal respect for the lifestyles, views and beliefs of others (Emotional Well-Being) and leaders with the capacity to perceive needs and apply leadership skills effectively (Social Responsibility).

The following is a picture of the three fully integrated and mutually enriching learning components, followed by a more detailed description, including the type of curriculum and instruction that will be incorporated within each element to ensure that students become life-learners and develop social and emotional well-being:



- (1) **Academic Excellence:** Odyssey offers a curriculum based in four major content areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, and history/social science. Non-core subject matter includes study of the humanities and physical education. A project-based approach provides opportunities to integrate multiple content areas and for teachers to be responsive to student interests as another means to address state

standards and achieve learning outcomes. The *Teaching for Understanding Framework* supports teachers in the planning of this work. All areas of study are developed in alignment with multiage and constructivist considerations.

- (2) **Emotional Well-Being:** OCS will equip students with principles that embrace a global understanding and universal respect for lifestyles, views and beliefs of others. Within the Emotional Well-Being component, students are taught to resolve conflicts peacefully. All Odyssey staff will be trained on conflict resolution techniques and how to mediate conflicts effectively that arise with and between students. An important aspect of the school's focus is to ensure the emotional and social well-being of students through relationship building and to provide students with the skills and knowledge they deserve and need to help them lead healthy, caring, responsible and productive lives.
- (3) **Social Responsibility:** By accessing resources in the community, Odyssey creates a "Classroom Without Walls," which provides opportunities for on-going civic engagement, leadership and increases the students understanding of their contribution to society. This will help students collaborate with parents, community volunteers, and teachers to create innovative ways to apply their knowledge in a real-world context. This will enable students to discover the answer to two persistent questions: "*Why do I need to know this?*" and "*How do I fit in?*" and to help students realize how their choices and actions affect others.

a. **Curriculum:**

(1) **Literacy (English/Language Arts):** Odyssey will use a balanced literacy approach to instruction in English/Language Arts. The implementation of the balanced literacy program will include but not be limited to read aloud (reading to students), shared reading (reading with students), guided reading (reading in small groups) and independent reading (reading by students), literature circles/book clubs, shared/interactive writing, and independent writing. Included is a conference approach, between student and teacher and between peers, to the learning of reading and writing. The intent is to understand a learner's individual abilities and misconceptions in these areas in order to provide appropriate instruction for his or her developmental level. Odyssey also recognizes that authentic literature is a necessary component in any balanced literacy program. Therefore, Odyssey will provide ample high quality classroom libraries for student use and teacher instruction. Literacy curriculum is congruous with the English Language Arts California state standards.

(2) **Numeracy:** Key features in Odyssey's approach to the teaching of mathematics include problem solving for everyday situations, developing readiness through hands-on activities, establishing links between past mathematical experiences and explorations of new concepts, sharing of ideas through discussion, cooperative learning through partner and small group activities, practice through games, ongoing assessment, and a home-school

partnership. California Content Standards in the area of Mathematics for the grade levels served will guide content addressed.

- (3) History/Social Science:** In order to provide a comprehensive curriculum, the teachers at Odyssey will utilize the “Teaching for Understanding” framework for developing an instructional plan, addressing the California Content Standards in History/Social Science. The framework calls for teachers to develop generative topics, understanding goals, performances of understanding in creating a coherent instructional plan for the teaching of history/social science concepts.
- (4) Science:** Odyssey believes that science is an active thinking-focused enterprise. Scientific knowledge advances when learners observe objects and events, think about how they relate to what is known, test their ideas in logical ways, and generate explanations that integrate the new information into an established order. Thus the scientific enterprise is both what we know (content) and how we come to know it (process). The best way for students to appreciate the scientific enterprise, learn important scientific concepts, and develop the ability to think well is to actively construct ideas through their own inquiries, investigations, and analyses. Science content explored is identified in the California science content standards.
- (5) Humanities/Visual Literacy:** Instruction and exposure to a variety of arts disciplines are vital to a child’s education, providing a common core of knowledge that helps students appreciate and understand history and cultures, develop critical and creative thinking, and aids them in problem-solving and self-esteem. Odyssey utilizes the visual arts as a primary teaching vehicle to teach students to understand the language, history and context of the visual arts and to link art with larger social and historical developments. It also teaches students by what means the written word (i.e. literature) is translated into visual images. We invite students to explore the power and impact of the visual image as a new language. They analyze the work of various artists, evaluate the message and impact of those works and understand how those works built upon, or were counter to, the philosophical and artistic ideas prevalent at the time the art was created.
- (6) Fitness and Wellness:** Odyssey believes that establishing early fundamental health awareness and exercising habits are a vital part of promoting emotional and social well-being. In addition, Fitness and Wellness teaches early prevention of lifestyle related health issues.
- (7) Technology:** Odyssey recognizes that “technology” is an integral part of our world today and into the future. The school is guided

by a phase-in plan for the integration of technology in its educational program. Annual goals will be described in the School Design Plan and will be updated at the end of each school year.

d. **Instructional Setting:** The distinctive characteristics of Odyssey's instructional setting are:

- (1) Multi-cultural, student-centered environment in which all students will be held to high academic and behavioral standards.
- (2) Balance of whole class, small group and individual settings flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students, including a modified inclusion model for students with exceptional needs who are capable of benefiting from Odyssey's unique school design.
- (3) Multi-sensory learning opportunities that honor and encourage the use of multiple intelligences and various learning styles.
- (4) An interdisciplinary and thematic approach, with project-based learning taking place both on campus and in the community.

e. **Multiage Learning Environment:** Odyssey will group students in a range of up to three grade levels. The practice of teaching students of different ages and ability levels together in the same classroom allows students to progress along a continuum of simple through more complex material at their own rates. In doing so the stigma that is inevitable when a student is either working below or above grade level is lessened. Students will typically stay with the same teacher for two or three years. This creates a learning environment that gives students extra time together to build relationships with each other and their teachers. This also provides an efficient continuum of experience that boosts achievement, learning and emotional well-being. This approach benefits teachers as well, giving them more time to get to know students, to know their needs and to use longer-term strategies to effectively teach to those needs. The benefits of a multiage setting include:

- ✓ Teachers are able to be more responsive to individual developmental stages, ability and interests
- ✓ Different levels of ability, development, and learning styles are expected, accepted, respected, and used to design curriculum and related activities
- ✓ The environment allows students to learn through active involvement with materials and with each other, with adults, and with other children serving as informal tutors
- ✓ Learning materials are concrete, real, and relevant to student's lives
- ✓ Promotes pro-social behavior by offering stimulating activities and encouraging choices

- ✓ Offers a familial setting, which allows teachers to nurture student's emotional and social well-being
- ✓ Students continually work to acquire competence in all areas, moving at their own rates through each aspect of the curriculum

f. **“Classroom Without Walls:”** Instructional activities will take place in the classroom setting, including indoor and outdoor environments, and in the community at various neighboring public facilities and community partners. These will include but are not limited to local public libraries, recreational and civic centers. By accessing resources in the community, Odyssey will create a “Classroom Without Walls,” providing opportunities for on-going civic engagement and increasing the students understanding of their contribution to society.

Students will be supported through collaboration with parents, volunteers, and teachers to create innovative ways to apply their knowledge in a real-world context, enabling students to discover the answer to two persistent questions: *“Why do I need to know this?”* and *“How do I fit in?”* and to help students realize how their choices and actions affect others. The expected outcomes of the “Classroom Without Walls” component will be to help students:

- ✓ Understand the relevance of what they are learning in school and apply the knowledge and skills to the world outside the school.
- ✓ Remember and use the content information and skills that they learn in class.
- ✓ Have an improved understanding of their role as citizens in a democratic society.
- ✓ Understand that every community has needs that are often unmet and learn how to identify those needs.
- ✓ Develop an ethic of providing service to others and to their community.
- ✓ Understand that working with other people as a team is often an effective way of addressing issues and solving community problems.
- ✓ Reflect on their experiences and on the effect of those experiences on the lives of people served or on their own lives.

Within the “Classroom Without Walls” component, students will also be introduced to and have opportunities to develop ingenuity and imagination as they seek to discover what might be possible in their life and the world around them. Additionally, Odyssey’s educational program will provide opportunities for students to learn at their own pace and develop the following critical thinking skills:

- ✓ Logic and reasoning: Students will demonstrate their ability to make fair comparisons, find distinguishing characteristics and put things to the test in a rational way.
- ✓ Decision-making: Students will demonstrate their ability to evaluate options through the filter of their core ethical values, determine the

significance to them personally, and predict the impact their choices will have on themselves and others.

- ✓ Analytical: Students will demonstrate their ability to analyze information and provide accurate details in an organized manner, while capturing the whole picture.
- ✓ Observational: Students will demonstrate their ability to see and convey findings using all their senses, to consider their audience and choose the appropriate communications mediums, and to recognize the depth and breadth needed to get their message across effectively.
- ✓ Adaptability: Students will demonstrate their ability to embrace change, challenge assumptions, consider different perspectives, speculate about varied possibilities, and pursue their natural curiosity.
- ✓ Creativity: Students will demonstrate their ability to use their imagination to create visionary ideas, consider “What if...?” scenarios and make remote connections between seemingly unrelated ideas or things.

Resources permitting, Odyssey will integrate a service-learning instructional approach into the “Classroom Without Walls.” These service-learning experiences will challenge students to address specific community needs by applying their developing skills. This type of work is informed by the definition of service-learning as defined in the National and Community Service Act of 1990 as:

- ✓ A method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; is coordinated with a school and the community; and helps foster civic responsibility.
- ✓ A method that is integrated into and enhances the core academic curriculum of the students; and provides structured time for the students to reflect on the service experience.

- g. **Collaborative Learning Environment**: A collaborative learning environment declares that *everyone* is a learner. In this environment there is a passion for teaching and learning. Teachers become facilitators who know their students’ talents, prior school experiences and needs and respect where they are coming from in order to support further learning. For true collaboration to take hold, teachers must create a learning environment that is emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically safe; where learners can acknowledge what they do not know, take risks, and reflect and revise what they know and what they choose to do. Most importantly, collaborative learning is about exploring the unknown together, beginning with an abundance of questions that challenge assumptions and spark lively discussions. It requires active listening, careful observation of how individuals are responding, and leaving space for silence that can often lead to great discoveries. Lastly, a collaborative learning environment allows

everyone to learn how to think on his or her own, interpret information, and think through problems.

- h. Individual Learning Plans:** Individual Learning Plans (ILP) will be developed annually in collaboration with individual students, his/her parents and teacher. The ILP is a set of individualized core and non-core academic learning goals, which will guide the students learning towards the school-wide learning outcomes. The parent, teacher and student will review the goals at the end of the first trimester to assess the student's progress towards the established goals. A final review of the student's progress towards achieving the goals will be evaluated midway through the last trimester by parent, teacher and student. At this time preliminary goals will be developed for the upcoming school year.
- i. Special Education – Modified Inclusion Model:** For students with exceptional needs for whom Odyssey's distinctive educational program is determined to be appropriate and the least restrictive environment, it is Odyssey's intention to provide special education services within a modified inclusion model. Appropriate designated instructional services and related services are also provided, consistent with the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). It is the intent of Odyssey to provide the continuum of options specified in Education Code Section 56361 through participation in LACOE's and related SELPA(s)' special education programs and services in the same manner that other public schools within LACOE and related SELPA(s).

Odyssey believes that students with special needs benefit educationally, socially and emotionally from the opportunity to receive services in this modified inclusion model. The school's Inclusion Specialist works in a collaborative model with all teachers and paraprofessionals to ensure that appropriate accommodations are in place and that the learning environment and curriculum are modified consistent with each student's IEP.

Odyssey will comply with state and federal laws regarding the education of disabled students, including, but not limited to, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to ensure that students with disabilities are afforded a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Odyssey pledges to cooperate with Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and related SELPA(s) to develop a positive relationship that is student-centered, meets federal and state requirements, and is fundamentally fair to all parties.

Consistent with the California Department of Education's regulations approved April 8, 1999, Odyssey will operate as a public school within LACOE. Odyssey recognizes that describing a plan to cover all special

education scenarios would be an impossible task and that even with the best plan there will always be scenarios that need to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, in light of the evolving nature of the regulations, Odyssey is committed to working with LACOE and the West San Gabriel Valley SELPA to develop an operational memorandum of understanding that includes, but is not limited to:

- ✓ The principles that will inform negotiations between Odyssey, LACOE, and/or the West San Gabriel Valley SELPA.
 - ✓ How Odyssey will participate in special education service offerings (i.e. what services will be available at Odyssey and when referrals will be made).
 - ✓ How and in what way Odyssey will participate as a public school within LACOE's role as a LEA in the West San Gabriel Valley SELPA.
 - ✓ How special education funding will support the above agreements.
- j. **English Language Learners:** It is the intent of Odyssey to ensure a systematic and strategic approach for strengthening and accelerating the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELL) so that they can successfully acquire the English language and transition from Limited English Proficient (LEP) to Fluent English Proficient (FEP). English Language Learners *must* be prepared to meet high academic standards. For these students, academic achievement requires that they become fully proficient in academic English without having to lose their native language (Cummins, 2000).

To ensure that our ELL students are able to fully participate in the school's Academic Excellence component while transitioning to Fluent English Proficient, various strategies will be employed including immersion and sheltered English. Odyssey recognizes that ELL students are entitled to participate in regular education and special education and are entitled to related space, equipment and instructional materials and supplies. To ensure that the school effectively assists ELL students in a successful transition from LEP to FEP status, Odyssey will:

- (1) Seek to offer services in the home language (as appropriate) while students are transitioning to English language proficiency.
- (2) Place ELL students in classrooms with a qualified teacher (or a teacher who is supervised by a qualified teacher) who possesses the appropriate qualifications, such as a CLAD or it's equivalent.
- (3) Make on-going professional development opportunities available to all teachers focused on research and best practices in second language acquisition so they become skilled in meeting the needs of ELL students.
- (4) Ensure that instructional materials for ELL students and curriculum frameworks and standards are aligned.
- (5) Carefully monitor the progress of ELL students.

- k. **Remedial or “acceleration” instructional practices:** Odyssey will use differentiated instruction to assist under-achieving students, based on the student’s current working level. Additional support from paraprofessionals and volunteers will be provided, resources permitting and per the school design plan. Student Study Team (SST) meetings will be held upon the request of the classroom teacher and will provide an additional forum to discuss supporting students without an Individual Education Plan.