



EnCompass Academy OAKLAND, CA



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CENTERING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL DESIGN

EnCompass Academy opened in 2004 in the community of East Oakland amid drastic demographic and economic shifts. Principal Minh-Tram Nguyen founded the school with a commitment to creating equitable family-school partnerships through a community-centric design. Even before the school opened its doors, she engaged with over 200 families through a door-knocking campaign to assess local needs while also recruiting parents for a school design team. This effort promoted trust early on by demonstrating school leadership's genuine interest in the priorities and strengths of the local community.

Principal Nguyen also stressed the importance of creating a design team that represented the community without exacerbating power imbalances between families and staff.¹ Specifically, she ensured that perspectives from the “four directions” — East, West, South, and North — were incorporated into the school's design so that Indigenous, Asian, Black, Latinx, and White voices were given equal influence in decision-making. The initial design process led to EnCompass's integration of familial and cultural knowledge into common educational frameworks. The design team adapted the Responsive Classroom² framework to feature the traditions of poetry, song, and dance in weekly community meetings. These meetings close with the communal reading of “In Lak'ech,”³ a poem by Chicano playwright Luis Valdez that reflects the school's respect for ancestral knowledge. Principal Nguyen considers these types of traditions an important tool for making school activities and lessons affirming and culturally relevant while centering student voice.⁴

This audio gallery is a product of the California Center for School Climate (CCSC), a California Department of Education initiative operated by WestEd that provides free support and trainings on school climate and data use to local education agencies in California.

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EnCompass also establishes trusting partnerships by recognizing the expertise of families by hiring parents such as Ms. Amelia Rico, the school's student-family connections coordinator. Ms. Rico supports Spanish-speaking families, who make up 71 percent of the student population at EnCompass, in understanding school policies and practices by interpreting at report-card conferences. These practices center a whole-child approach while maintaining the school's vision for students to uphold a "life spiral that starts with Self, is guided by Family, engages with Community, and is rooted in Ancestors and ancestral heritage."

References

- ¹ Ishimaru, A.M., Bang, M., & Valladares, M. (2019, December 11). *5 new ways for schools to work with families*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/5-new-ways-for-schools-to-work-with-families-120964>
- ² Edutopia. (2017, October 3). *Morning meetings: Building community in the classroom* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6_pLkwaCeY
- ³ La Trenza, an Indio Ink Production. (2021, May 15). *Student in Lak'ech collaboration* [Video]. YouTube. <http://www.guadalupecardona.com/chls-105-student-inlakech.html>
- ⁴ Rucker, N.W. (2019, December 10). *Getting started with culturally responsive teaching*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/getting-started-culturally-responsive-teaching>

School Information	
Number of students	329
Geographic setting	Urban
Grades served	K–5
School model	Traditional public school

Student Demographics	
Latinx	71.1%
Black	18.5%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3.6%
White	3.3%
Multiracial	1.5%
Filipino	0.3%
Students with disabilities	13.4%
English language learners	51.7%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	13.4%

Data sourced from the [California School Dashboard](#).



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Consider while you listen . . .

EnCompass Academy hires parents like Ms. Rico to recognize and apply cultural and familial expertise at the school. **How are parents involved in your school community? How could roles like a student-family connections coordinator benefit your students, staff, and families?**

Principal Nguyen shared the risks that tokenization and power imbalances pose in family-school partnerships. **Have you noticed these dynamics within your school community? How do you ensure that one group or voice does not take over or dominate decision-making in your school community?**