

A photograph of two children, a girl on the left and a boy on the right, smiling and looking at the camera. They are in a garden, surrounded by large-leafed plants with prominent red veins, likely Swiss chard. The girl is wearing glasses and has her hand near her chin. The boy is also smiling broadly. The background shows more greenery and a building structure.

# the ascend voice

Fall 2008

## ASCEND's Garden "Creates Life and Community"

The fruits and vegetables for sale on campus this fall are homegrown, in every sense of the word. Students running ASCEND's new Farmers' Market offer edibles straight from the schoolyard that they planted, picked, and cared for under the tutelage of Oakland Leaf After-School Program Garden Manager, Matthew Linzner.

If you'd visited the school a couple years ago, you wouldn't have seen a Farmers' Market – or even a garden. At ASCEND's **Garden Livication** event last spring, students, staff, and community supporters gathered to celebrate how far our thriving garden has come in such a short time, thanks to an East Bay Community Foundation grant and a lot of hard work from students and staff. Former ASCEND student Reyna was among the speakers remembering the days when the garden and adjoining recreation field were little more than a dream. "I remember playing soccer in the parking lot," she recalled. "Now we actually have grass for soccer, and plants and trees and berries and nice flowers [in the garden]. To go from a parking lot of cement to this...is a very big difference."

Others talked about how refreshing it has been to watch the garden grow: "When you hear so much in the news about destruction, it's important to be part of an organization that creates life and community," an Oakland Leaf employee said. "This is something we can all do together and have a connection to the food we grow."

The celebration ended with a garden tour led by ASCEND students. As he guided guests through the various crops, a young gardener offered running commentary: "Those are edible...those aren't. Those are snap peas," he said, expertly snapping one off and handing it to a reporter. "This is mustard -- we eat that, too. Here we have raspberries and blackberries -- they're scrumptious! We're now approaching the native plants...their blossoms are starting to grow."

Clearly, the garden experience is having a great impact on our students. As Reyna put it, "Gardening has made a big difference to me – it can change you. You can start out like one of the seeds, then grow and go to college."

## Hard Work Pays Off for ASCEND Students and Teachers

This fall, ASCEND's students and staff learned what their hard work during the 2007-08 school year earned them: Our California Standards Test (CST) scores were phenomenal! Here are some of the highlights:

- Every measured "subgroup" of students showed major improvement.
- Of those subgroups, our English-language learners made the most dramatic leap. This was especially rewarding, given the considerable challenge of testing in English when it's not their first language, and often not spoken at home.
- In both Math and English Language Arts, ASCEND was one of only six Oakland schools to move more than 10 percent of students out of lower levels into grade level and from grade level into more advanced levels.

These state tests are considered "gatekeepers" and predictors of future academic success - including being on track for college. While test scores are not the focus of teaching and learning, the reality is that schools are judged, and often financed, by these outcomes. A year of hard work from both teachers and students at ASCEND resulted in CST scores the entire ASCEND family can take pride in.

"We are closing our own internal achievement gap," explained proud Principal Larissa Adam. "Teachers and students worked so hard, and the scores show that. It is very satisfying to see our hard work pay off!"



## 2009 ASCEND Expositions

### Save the Dates!

Please join our 3rd-, 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-graders on **Saturday, January 3, 2009, 11 AM – 3 PM** as they showcase their work in the first of our two Student Expositions. Students will present research projects, writing, performances, music, and art. The displays will celebrate ASCEND's unique integration of arts and academics, and we invite all ASCEND supporters to witness our creative approaches to learning. The Expo doubles as a fundraiser run by ASCEND's families, who will cook and sell food. All proceeds support the 2009 8th-grade promotion ceremony.

Our second Student Expo will take place **May 30, 2009**, when kindergartners, 1st-, 2nd-, and 5th-grades get the chance to highlight their projects combining arts and academic learning.



## Support ASCEND!

*As an Oakland public school, ASCEND receives government funding that covers only our most basic needs. We must rely on individual donations to continue our unique and thriving arts integration program and our garden program, as well as pay for experiences such as field trips that students in wealthier neighborhoods take for granted.*

This year, our fundraising goal is \$15,000. The future is in our children, and you can "pay it forward" by making a one-time or recurring tax-deductible donation. Simply visit [www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org) and hit "Donate Now" (please select "ASCEND" from the School Designation drop-down menu), or send a check to "OSSF/ASCEND," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

ASCEND is a member of the OSSF network

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