



ASPIRE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS



Our Collective Movement

Aspire Public Schools

2021-2022

Gratitude Report

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Letter from our CEO

Mala Batra

CEO, Aspire Public Schools

Dear Aspire Partner,

In another year that brought many twists and turns, I am deeply grateful to Aspire's scholars, team, families, communities, and partners for their ongoing commitment to the success of our schools. As nearly all scholars and teammates came back together in our school buildings, we knew the return would be full of joy and reconnection. But we also knew that scholar experiences while they were away would require increased attention on their social-emotional needs and mental health, all while continuing to support their unique academic needs. I am proud to say that we did exactly that.

Aspire is **re-emerging stronger**. We never thought of this year as an opportunity to make up for lost time. Instead, we focused on ways we could accelerate scholar learning through engaging, rigorous, and culturally responsive academic programming. With a focus on disrupting disproportionate outcomes for our most historically underserved scholars—those with disabilities, multi-language learners, and Black students—Aspire leveraged data to drive decisions about inclusive programming to engage all scholars.

This showed up in many ways throughout Aspire. We expanded Aspire's co-teaching model through a partnership with the CHIME Institute, a national leader in inclusive education. We rolled out a new K-5 science curriculum that provides consistency and professional learning opportunities, and includes culturally responsive teaching practices. We expanded our regional multilingual supports to lay the foundation for more robust professional development opportunities for all. And we worked with teammates across Aspire to define and refine Aspire's definition of culturally responsive teaching, which we will infuse in all of our interactions with our scholars and communities.

Aspire is **re-engaging our community**. Aspire's highest priority is always the safety of our communities, and never has that been more relevant than during the pandemic. This focus isn't just about physical safety, but also how we cultivate communities that foster inclusive and joyful learning environments. This year, we deepened our implementation of the RULER Social-Emotional Learning curriculum—an SEL approach that builds scholars' emotional intelligence and supports teachers and leaders to build a positive, empowering school culture. We are accelerating our efforts to bring a culturally responsive lens to our work with RULER.

Aspire is **re-investing with resilience**. Investing in our team isn't just to ensure scholar success, but to promote a sustainable working environment where every teammate feels like they can meaningfully contribute and bring their authentic self to work. This has been a difficult year for educators, and we knew we needed to prioritize teammate well-being so they could show up for our scholars every day. Through initiatives like reopening bonuses, building in more planning time during the work day, affinity spaces, and additional paid time off, we build up our team so they can do the most important work.

We also wanted to use the COVID crisis as an opportunity to reimagine how we allocate resources to maximize their impact on scholar success. Aspire underwent an organizational restructure to move to a more regional model. By moving more resources and decision-making closer to our scholars, we are enabling more local input to inform resource allocation. In the years ahead, this will lead to more direct support for educators in schools so they can hone their craft, more regional student support services, and more content area knowledge closer to the scholars we serve.

As part of our organizational restructure, we are proud to announce a shift in our regional leadership from Area Superintendents to Executive Directors. This new position acknowledges regional leader roles in not just overseeing schools, but also in building community partnerships, developing talent, supporting the operational and fiscal health of each region, and contributing to organization-wide decision making. We have also added a Superintendent of Equitable Instruction in each region, ensuring school leaders have the support they need to build inclusive and effective learning environments for all scholars. And we are proud to be deepening our commitment to Aspire's Equity Commitments through a new role—Chief Equity and People Officer—to ensure our approaches to people development continue to bind us together across the state.

The pages that follow showcase some of the many things we are proud of this year, and are reflections of our ongoing commitment to this important work. Thank you for your continued support, which helps us deepen our impact and make Aspire stronger each and every year.

With Gratitude,

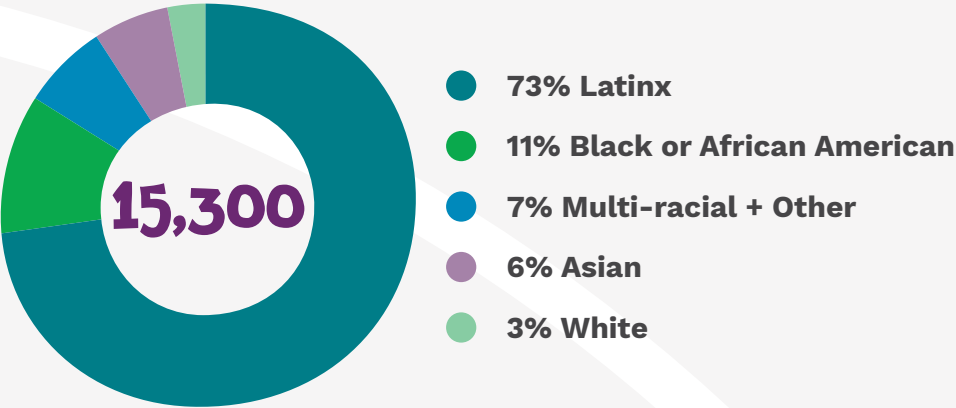




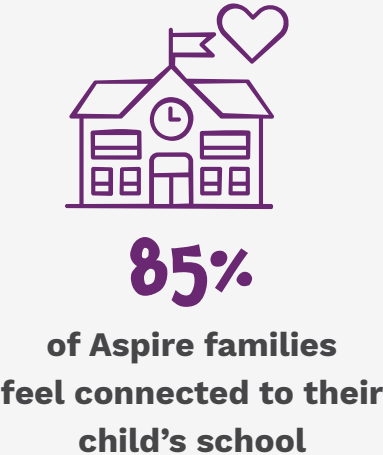
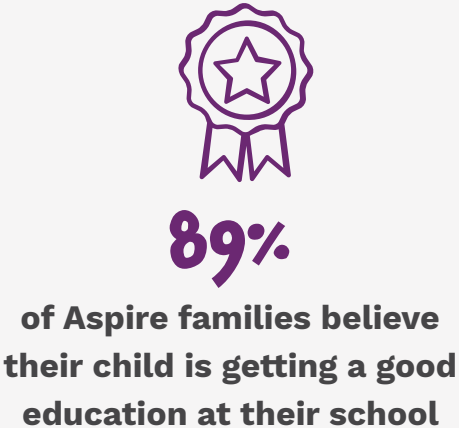
“My teachers help me feel supported by making sure I fully understand and not making me feel insecure about what questions I ask.”

— Mignon Williams, Aspire Berkley Maynard Academy 5th grade scholar

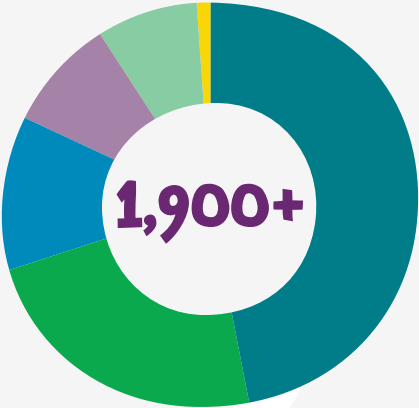
Our Scholars and Families



Aspire alumni are nearly 3x more likely to earn a college degree than the national average for low-income students



Our Teammates



- 47% Latinx
- 23% White
- 12% Black or African American
- 9% Multi-racial + Other
- 8% Asian
- 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander



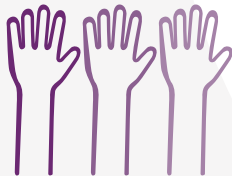
89%

of teachers plan to work at Aspire next year (compared to only 77% nationwide according to a recent RAND survey)



88%

of teammates report being able to be their authentic selves at work and share all aspects of their culture and identity



62%

of teachers identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color



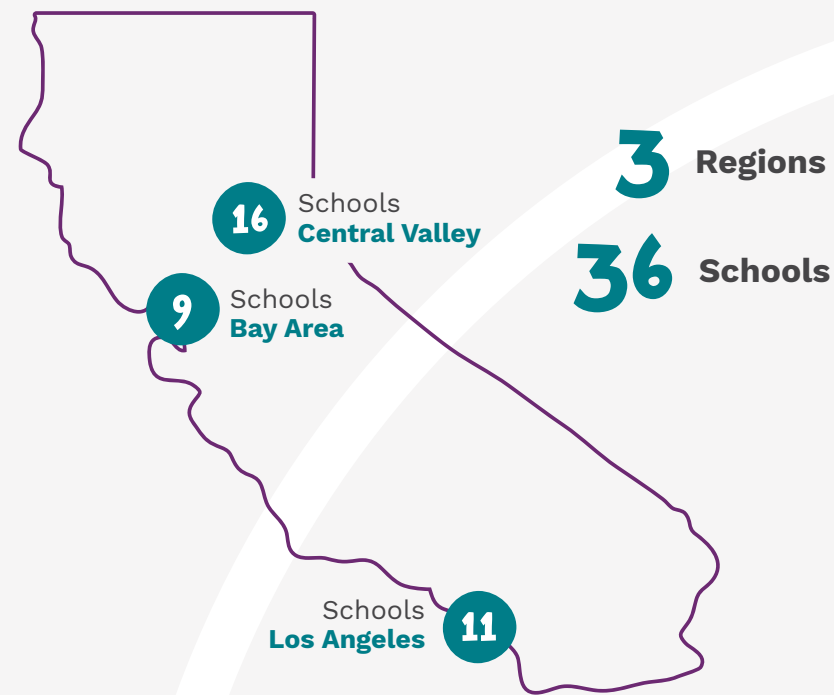
5.6 years

average years of prior teaching experience

“Black educators have the perspective Black students need to be able to see themselves in different ways. As a young person, you do not necessarily recognize all the possible potential for yourself without seeing it through other people that look like you. I share my life experiences with my students. They begin to think ‘my life sounds like your life and you are here, able to do it.’”

— Shantel Lockhart, Aspire Langston Hughes Academy history teacher

Our Schools



Our Results



19

**Aspire schools
were awarded High
Student Academic
Growth by CORE
Districts* in 2019****



100%

of charters renewed



94%

graduation rate



91%

student retention

*CORE Districts is a collaboration of California school districts focused on improving student achievement through partnership and learning.

**Student achievement data is not available for 2020 and limited in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and pause on statewide testing.



An exciting milestone for Aspire in Stockton!

Earlier this year, we received unanimous approval on a material revision from the Stockton Unified School Board to create a TK-12 campus in the Sierra Vista housing development, which will house Aspire APEX Academy (TK-5) and Aspire Stockton Secondary Academy (6-12). This is a huge milestone to deliver on a long-held commitment to secure a safe, high-quality facility for our Aspire APEX community.



Five Aspire high schools received recognition as a “Best High School” by the 2022 U.S. News and World Report Rankings.

- ★ Aspire Benjamin Holt College Preparatory Academy: #3 in Stockton
- ★ Aspire Vanguard College Preparatory Academy: #17 in Modesto
- ★ Aspire Langston Hughes Academy: #21 in Stockton
- ★ Aspire Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy: #27 in Bay Area
- ★ Aspire Olin University Preparatory Academy: #55 in Los Angeles

Only in partnership and by listening deeply to one another, can we create collective movement.



Our Core Values

Our communities, which are predominantly Black and Latinx, persist in a system that does not adequately educate everyone. Aspire Public Schools aims to transform the disproportionate outcomes that result from that system, and which are exacerbated by the disparate learning loss and trauma experienced during the pandemic. When combined with our anti-racist core values, our priorities and initiatives will drive us to achieve greater racial, social, and gender equity across our schools and communities.



Bienestar (Well-being)

Learning, working, and playing require us to feel safe and well. Our spaces and interactions support physical, emotional, cultural, ethnic, academic, and social safety, allowing us to feel secure enough to bring our full selves each day.



Culture of Belonging

At Aspire we can be our authentic selves and be comfortable sharing all aspects of our identities. We respect and celebrate each other's differences, and approach one another with empathy and understanding—no matter one's background or cultural history. Each person is valued and has a place in this community.



Community Partnership

We are all connected and collectively responsible for the well-being of every member of our extended community. When one of us is let down, we are all let down. When one of us succeeds, we all succeed. **Only in partnership and by listening deeply to one another, can we create collective movement.**



Agency + Self-determination

Each person has unique dreams. At Aspire, we set a foundation for our scholars to gain knowledge, skills, and power to access and make choices for their families and post-secondary lives.



Joy

We strive to make Aspire and our communities a joyful place to learn, work, and be, together. Our work to shift outcomes is hard, yet we persist, and have gratitude and pride in the journey. Joy makes it all possible!



Continued Family Relief Support

Our supporters know that the dual pandemics of health and racial justice continue to amplify the needs faced by our communities. In response, the Wend Collective generously donated additional family relief funding to our Los Angeles schools this year. Their support allowed us to purchase groceries and warm clothing for our scholars, and to send direct financial support to over 550 Aspire families.



Provided support to over
550 Aspire families



Dr. Ian E. Brown

MD, PhD

- Assistant Professor, UC Davis Medical Center
- Surgeon and researcher, specializing in trauma
- Co-Founder of the UC Davis Wraparound Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program



Dr. James E.K. Hildreth

MD, PhD

- President & CEO, Meharry Medical College
- Member of FDA panel that has helped approve Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines
- Member of the White House COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force

COVID-19 Vaccine Engagement Sessions with Medical Experts

This fall, Aspire hosted two COVID-19 vaccine engagement sessions with medical experts, facilitated by Aspire Interim Senior Director of HR & Talent, Stephanie Vaughn. These conversations provided teammates the opportunity to engage with medical professionals regarding their questions about the COVID-19 vaccine.



Increased Resources to Support Scholar Mental Health

All Aspire schools provide a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for students to ensure we are applying an intentional, data-driven continuous improvement framework to mental health and social-emotional support. The MTSS framework proactively identifies students with academic or behavioral needs, utilizing early assessment and intervention to help them catch up with peers sooner. Key components include universal screening and tiers of interventions that allow schools to meet students where they are and respond equitably according to level of need.

Rebuilding Community: Simpler than it Sounds, Harder than it Looks

Op-Ed written by Anthony Solina, Aspire Central Valley Superintendent

Published October 26, 2021 on [Edsource.org](#)

In March 2020, as schools closed their doors, we were forced to adapt to the sudden shift to our daily routines and learn other strategies to make distance learning work. Now, three months back into in-person learning, we see daily examples of a new learning curve: not being able to wait to use the restroom, forgetting to raise your hand before speaking and struggling to take turns on the playground.

These things remind me just how long we were away. While these examples may seem small, it was clear to me that they are markers of a larger challenge. After 18 months away, the fabric of our community had begun to fray. We'd forgotten what it looked like to learn together and eroded part of the foundation of trust and care on which we built our students' education. Especially after the devastating emotional and mental toll of the pandemic, it is almost unthinkable to imagine asking students to learn to read, play an instrument or solve algebra equations without first rebuilding a nurturing and safe environment.

As superintendent of Aspire Public Schools' Central Valley region, this was both overwhelming and energizing. I knew it would help us to focus on what really matters in our schools and that it would require immediate attention to rebuild the community that is so central to what our staff, scholars and families love about our schools.

Creating this culture is simpler than we often make it out to be. We believe learning doesn't occur until all students feel included, loved and safe. That means we make community building and the social-emotional

care of our students a priority. We treat social-emotional learning with the same focus and attention as math and history, leveraging a dedicated curriculum that we apply inside classrooms and in conversations among staff and with families. And we encourage our teachers to take time—real time, during the school day—to get to know students and listen intently to their needs and challenges. When you make it clear that relationships, belonging and wellness matter, then you build a culture that centers on community. School is not merely in the physical buildings where we learn, but it's also in the relationships we build among adults and scholars.

And yet, simple as it may be, it takes a lot of work and investment from every person who interacts with our students to make it a reality. We have created structures across our schools, within classrooms, and in partnership with parents that reinforce this value.

Our advisory classes focus on social-emotional wellness and social justice, giving students a dedicated space to honor their identities and create community. Morning-meeting circles establish a warm environment to start the day. We carve out dedicated time for teachers to collaborate, building bonds and lines of communication to more holistically support students. And we engage students and families in their learning, leaving our doors open for parents to observe classes and instituting innovative engagement models. Our student-led conferences and Saturday Schools provide students with an active role in communicating their progress and give parents a window into their students' day-to-day learning. While these practices predate the pandemic, they have emerged post-pandemic as more essential than ever.



All of these strategies require both the simple commitment to making our community a priority and the dedicated time and effort of every team member. And I'm beginning to see the impact of our hard work. Our community is slowly stitching itself back together, in many ways stronger than it was before.

Do we have it all figured out? Of course not. But the rhythm of our days is becoming more consistent and the feelings of our community—joy, stability, belonging—are filling our hallways and classrooms again.

As schools across our country have fought our way through another confusing fall, I encourage my fellow

school leaders to take a good look at the health of your school community. We are all being pulled in many directions, from urgent concerns about Covid-19—contact tracing, independent study, staffing shortages—to the daunting challenges of learning loss. But underneath all that is the foundation we build for learning and the community we create for our students, teachers, and families.

Pay close attention to that community, make it a priority and invest in it appropriately, and I truly believe that is how we will get back on course to provide the learning and opportunities that every student deserves.



“The rhythm of our days is becoming more consistent and the feelings of our community—joy, stability, belonging—are filling our hallways and classrooms again.”

— Anthony Solina, Aspire Central Valley Superintendent

Culture of Belonging



Lifting up Black Excellence

As part of Aspire’s commitment to equity, one of our priorities is to lift up Black Excellence—programs that teach about, celebrate, and honor Black culture—throughout our schools. We are proud to have launched many culturally responsive programs that serve our scholars and teammates, and will continue to expand on these initiatives in the years to come.



Serving Our Scholars with Disabilities

Aspire Public Schools is pairing special and general education teachers. The co-teaching model is backed by research showing all students stand to benefit socially and academically when students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms, and is made possible through a partnership with the CHIME Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“We are hoping that keeping kids in their classroom—supporting them socially and emotionally alongside their peers—will actually foster a sense of belonging that they didn’t have during the pandemic.”

— **Meghann Cazale**, Director of Special Education for Aspire’s Central Valley Region



Creating Culturally Inclusive Communities

Growing up in southeast Los Angeles, Jorge Reyes wanted his children to attend a school where they would be encouraged to share their cultural traditions. Mr. Reyes and his family are members of Iztacuatli, an Aztec dance troupe that goes back three generations in their family. The Reyes family had heard positive things about Firestone Academy and decided to enroll their oldest daughter, Milinna, who was starting second grade. A decade later, the family’s youngest son, Diego, is now a fourth-grade student at the school. Their middle daughter, Aureli, also attended Firestone. Over the past ten years, the extended Reyes family—also members of Iztacuatli—have performed the powerful native Aztec dance Chichimeca during Firestone’s annual Dia de Los Muertos celebration.





Recruiting Special Education Teachers with Credentialing, Mentorship, and Better Salaries

“As schools nationwide scramble to hire special education teachers after a pandemic-exacerbated shortage, a California charter network is turning to existing staff to fill classroom slots by paying for costly credential programs, boosting salaries, and providing mentors. Aspire’s Education Specialist Intern Sponsorship program creates a pipeline of school volunteers and classroom aides ‘already in the door,’ providing a pathway for uncredentialed staff, predominantly Black and Latino adults—who also reflect the network’s 15,000 students—to stay with the school community.”

Published January 10, 2022 on the74million.org



“I’ve seen this across systems, not just Aspire, where we have these great educators in our schools, who just need support in accessing credential programs. They’re invested in our schools; they want to work with our kids; they want to work in Special Education.”

— Lisa Freccero, Aspire Senior Director of Special Education

Share the Love

In February 2022, Aspire held its second annual school-based fundraising campaign, Share the Love. Through the campaign, our schools raised direct support for programs that move the needle at their specific sites. 18 of our schools raised over \$1000! This funding will pay for playground improvement, hands-on science materials, elective and extracurricular programming, college scholarships for graduating seniors, and more.



Aspire team members and families met with State Assemblymember Mia Bonta to discuss the impact of the cost of quarantine on Aspire schools and scholars.

Our Advocacy Work: The Cost of Quarantine

As schools have continued to navigate the pandemic this school year, Aspire has been diligent about ensuring the health and safety of every scholar and teammate. But this diligence has come at a cost: California state law was unjustly penalizing students by withholding money for their education when they had to follow state-mandated quarantines. In the first two months of school alone, the state withheld \$1.2 million from Aspire scholars—and that was before the Omicron variant hit, forcing thousands more scholars to quarantine.

To advocate for a solution that didn’t force schools to choose between their students’ safety and the funding they need to keep their schools running, Aspire launched the Cost of Quarantine campaign. And we were successful! In May 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom released a budget proposal revision ending the financial penalization of student quarantines.

Agency + Self-determination

Aspire’s Early College Program

Aspire Vanguard College Preparatory Academy’s partnership with Modesto Junior College has given our scholars tuition-free access to prerequisite college courses, allowing them to start college one to two years ahead and saving thousands of dollars in tuition. Through our Early College Program, many Aspire scholars earn an Associate’s degree by the time they graduate high school, and our alumni tell us the college courses they took at Aspire were the best preparation for their college experience.

“Through the Early College Program at Aspire I was able to navigate higher education systems in a low-stakes environment. This gave me the confidence to know that I could be successful at a four-year college. I was excited to start my college experience at UC Berkeley because I knew I would be prepared to manage the academic rigors of college since I had experienced it through the Early College Program at Vanguard.”

— **Alexia Puerta Cordova**, Aspire Vanguard College Preparatory Academy alumna, class of 2021



Shining Stars Award Winners

The Aspire Shining Stars award recognizes outstanding seniors across our high schools in the Central Valley, Bay Area, and Los Angeles regions. Since the award’s inception in 2016, seven cohorts of exceptional college-bound scholars have been awarded a scholarship to put towards their post-secondary education. Our Shining Stars have a wide variety of lived experiences, and each is tenacious, persistent, and active in their community. This year, our 2022 Shining Stars truly exemplified the grit, effort, and spirit of College for Certain. This scholarship was made possible through the generosity of Richard and Theresa Crocker, to whom we are incredibly grateful.



Aaliyah Cusseaux



Baila Brima



Giovanni Francisco Diaz



Harleen Kaur



Jenae Cayenne



Jennifer Cruz



Liseth Calderon



**Maria Isabel
Toscano**



Melani Garces



Don Shalvey Award Winners

Our Changing the Odds scholarship program was created in 2009 to honor Aspire’s founder, Don Shalvey. The award recognizes alumni who—like Don—are the first in their families to graduate from college, give back to their communities, and continue to demonstrate determination in the pursuit of College for Certain. Three winners are selected each year across our three regions. Our most recent winners Bibiana, Sara, and Wendy have impressive resumes, spanning student leadership, Americorps, advocacy work, and volunteer mentorship. Truly personifying the call to give back to their communities, two of our three winners even returned to work at their alma maters. Congratulations, Don Shalvey: Changing the Odds award recipients!



Bibiana Cardoso

Aspire Richmond
California College
Preparatory Academy '13



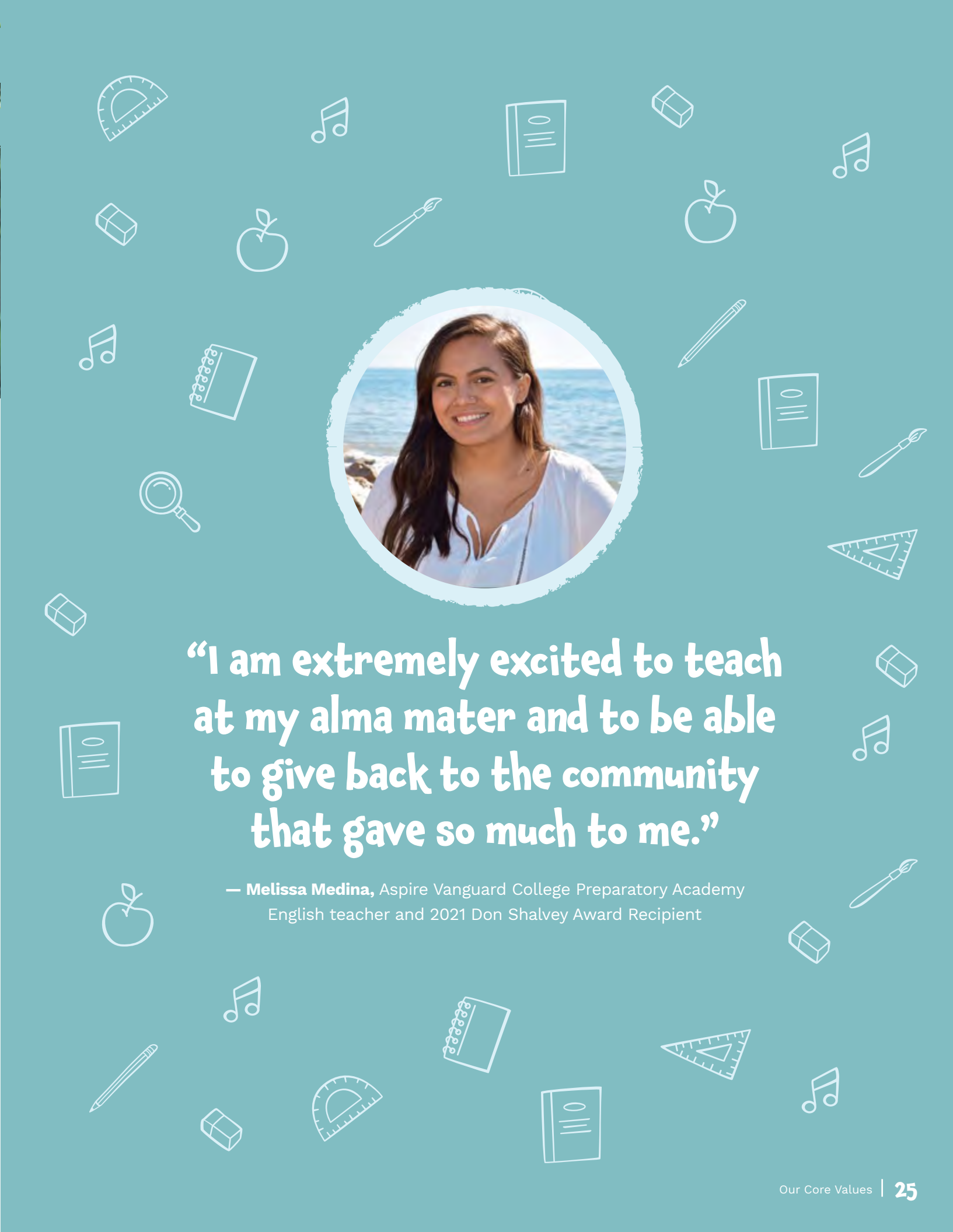
Sara Lopez

Aspire Benjamin Holt
College Preparatory
Academy '18



Wendy Sanchez

Aspire Pacific
Academy '13



“I am extremely excited to teach at my alma mater and to be able to give back to the community that gave so much to me.”

— **Melissa Medina**, Aspire Vanguard College Preparatory Academy
English teacher and 2021 Don Shalvey Award Recipient



Honoring Black Teammates, Scholars, and Community Leaders

Aspire proudly celebrates Black History Month, Black joy, and Black excellence! We celebrate the persistence of these elements of Black culture despite trauma and a history of oppression. While honoring Black History Month does not replace the critical work of elevating Black excellence year-round and making our curriculum culturally relevant, this month is an important opportunity to reflect on where we are and to acknowledge the many contributions of our Black teammates, scholars, and community leaders.

Providing Personalized Tutoring to Scholars

Before Education Secretary Miguel Cardona urged schools to spend relief funds on a strategy known as “high-dosage tutoring,” we partnered with Paper to offer our scholars on-demand, one-on-one virtual tutoring in core academic subjects. It has proven to be a game-changer for many of our scholars. The circumstances of the pandemic posed significant challenges for many scholars; having consistent, on-the-spot access to high-quality tutoring

provided a valuable resource to help fill learning gaps and improve understanding.

With our scholar population disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, this program has been an invaluable resource and has helped build academic confidence and understanding among our scholars.



“Since using Paper, I have seen a dramatic improvement in scholars’ understanding of concepts and grades have significantly improved. My scholars are much more confident in their work as a result of the tutoring.”

— Jillian Eichenauer, Aspire Centennial College Preparatory Academy math teacher



Aspire Capitol Heights is Moving to a New Building!

In March, current and prospective Aspire families toured the new site of Aspire Capitol Heights Academy in Sacramento. The new site is anticipated to open this fall and will allow the school to more than double its scholar enrollment (from 280 to 600 scholars).

This safe and modern facility will allow for its current scholars to continue to receive a high-quality education through the eighth grade, avoiding a disruption to their education caused by changing schools. The new location will also provide improved technology infrastructure, increased accessibility, and a safe and private student drop off and pick up location.



Bianka as a 4th grade student at Aspire EPACS

Coming Full Circle: An Aspire Teacher's Journey

Bianka Mariscal began her Aspire journey in 1998, as a six year old founding scholar at Aspire East Palo Alto Charter School (EPACS). As immigrants her parents believed deeply that a college degree would be a powerful tool in transforming her future, and this is why they enrolled their first grade daughter in a brand new school focused on college for certain. When asked what she remembers about her time as an Aspire scholar, Bianka talks about her teachers. Her fourth-grade teacher, Bess Kennedy—who is currently the Executive Director of the Aspire Public Schools Foundation—fostered her love of books by reading chapters of Harry Potter out loud to her class. Her science teacher fostered a love of science through interactive ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire’-style exams after which he cooked breakfast for the winning team, and her math teacher fostered a love of arithmetic by measuring and building flower beds for a community garden—the same garden that is flourishing at EPACS today. These teachers and many more became mentors who helped guide Bianka to and through college.

Bianka's deep sense of service and community drove her back to EPACS following college graduation, this time as a resident teacher in an Aspire classroom. Now a kindergarten teacher at the very school she attended, she experiences full circle the ways in which our schools are a reflection of Aspire communities. Her greatest joy is seeing the light in the eyes of her young scholars when they discover new concepts. She has always believed that if she could impact even one child's learning, she will have made a lasting mark for her community. Nine years into her Aspire career—and 24 years after she first stepped foot in an Aspire classroom—we are proud to say that Bianka's mark is so much greater than just one student.



Our Appreciation

We are grateful to each and every donor who contributed to Aspire Public Schools in 2021-2022.



Aspire Public Schools Board of Directors

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Aspire Public Schools

Aspire Bay Area Region

Oakland, CA

Aspire Berkley Maynard Academy (TK-8)
Aspire College Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Golden State College Preparatory Academy (6-12)
Aspire Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy (6-12)
Aspire Monarch Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Triumph Technology Academy (TK-5)

East Palo Alto, CA

Aspire East Palo Alto Charter School (TK-8)

Richmond, CA

Aspire Richmond California College Preparatory Academy (6-12)
Aspire Richmond Technology Academy (TK-5)

Aspire Central Valley Region

Stockton, CA

Aspire APEX Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Arts & Sciences Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Benjamin Holt College Preparatory Academy (9-12)
Aspire Benjamin Holt Middle School (6-8)
Aspire Langston Hughes Academy (6-12)
Aspire Port City Academy (TK-5)
Aspire River Oaks Charter School (TK-5)
Aspire Rosa Parks Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Stockton Secondary Academy (6-12)
Aspire Vincent Shalvey Academy (TK-5)

Sacramento, CA

Aspire Alexander Twilight College Preparatory Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Alexander Twilight Secondary Academy (6-12)
Aspire Capitol Heights Academy (TK-7)

Modesto, CA

Aspire Summit Charter Academy (TK-5)
Aspire University Charter School (TK-5)
Aspire Vanguard College Preparatory Academy (6-12)

Aspire Los Angeles Region

Huntington Park, CA

Aspire Antonio Maria Lugo Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Centennial College Preparatory Academy (6-8)
Aspire Junior Collegiate Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Ollin University Preparatory Academy (6-12)
Aspire Pacific Academy (6-12)
Aspire Titan Academy (TK-5)

South Gate, CA

Aspire Firestone Academy (TK-5)
Aspire Gateway Academy (TK-5)

Los Angeles, CA

Aspire Inskeep Academy (TK-6)
Aspire Slauson Academy (TK-6)
Aspire Tate Academy (TK-6)

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