

A HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OHLONE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

1970 to 1976

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PROLOGUE

To chronicle the development of the Ohlone Alternative Program, it is imperative to first examine the context that influenced change.

The 1976 Palo Alto Unified School District's Board of Education decision to designate the first school of choice in its history was preceded by years of intellectual, academic and emotional movement towards such a dramatic alternative and approached with a great deal of thought, caution, analysis and debate. The story begins with a look at the times and an understanding of the climate of change impacting our entire nation. Though Ohlone has maintained its alternative status for all these years, getting to this point wasn't, nor has it been, always easy.



OHLONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 950 Amarillo Avenue Palo Alto

Ohlone School is a Board-designated district school of choice with voluntary enrollment from throughout the district. The program is sometimes called Open Education, with classrooms that are characterized by pupil-initiated activity, independent study, pupils progressing at their own rate, peer tutoring, and the teacher functioning as a guide and facilitator of learning. Classrooms are multi-aged and feature relaxed informal atmosphere with an integrated day schedule.

A school farm which contains gardens, a small orchard and animals provides hands-on learning for children in science. A pilot project titled CARE, helps children and parents in solving the problems of growing up in a complex society.

The basic goal of Ohlone is to help each child acquire the tools of learning - reading, oral and written language, mathematics - in such a way that each child experiences a joy of learning, is able to use these tools to further his learning, and has the desire to further his learning.

Ohlone accepts students from neighborhood schools on a first-come, first-served basis, from a waiting list. The student body is a cross-section representative of Palo Alto as a whole. Students come from all sections of town.

The school has a SIP program, with focuses on science, mathematics, critical thinking, the arts in education, communication, and open philosophy. A staff-written Code (philosophy statement) outlines the philosophy of the open-education program. Parent participation in classrooms is welcomed and encouraged, but not required. Last year parents contributed over 12,000 volunteer hours to the school. The PTA actively supports the program, especially by augmenting SIP aides in the classrooms.

A special education class of learning-handicapped students enriches the school and provides opportunities for mainstreaming and reverse mainstreaming.

District funding for Ohlone School is on the same basis as other elementary schools.

THE CONTEXT

Political and Social Reform and...Upheaval

The ten years of the 1970s followed a ground swell of change ignited by the civil rights movement and anti-war demonstrations of the previous decade. There were organized reform movements in the



Environment, Health Care, Prison Rights, Labor, Women's Rights, the rights of Seniors ("Gray Power"), Gays, Welfare and Labor. It was a time of significant unrest and a desire for change

across the United States and around the

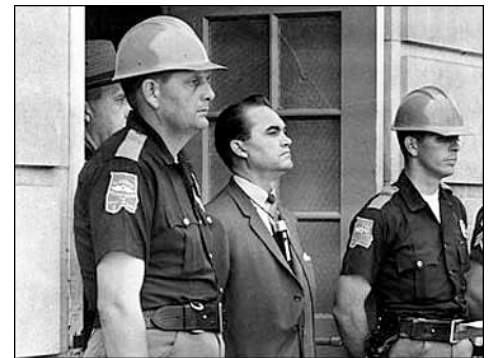


world.

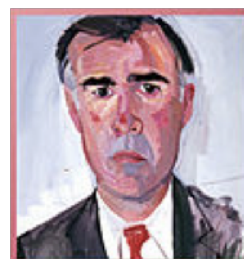
Richard Nixon

and

Gerald Ford were U.S. Presidents, Ronald Reagan and Jerry Brown were California governors, Cesar Chavez and Jessie Jackson were political activists,



George Wallace was the volatile Governor of Alabama, and Vice-President Spiro Agnew was forced to resign due to charges of tax fraud, bribery, conspiracy and extortion. This monumental event was followed by an even bigger scandal in Washington D.C. with the Watergate break-in and cover-up and the eventual resignation of President Richard Nixon.



In San Francisco, George Moscone, Diane Feinstein and Art Agnos were Mayors of the city and ex-supervisor Dan White was imprisoned for assassinating Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

In 1970, the first Earth Day took place in April, four students were shot and killed by

Earth Day



soldiers at Kent State University and the first Gay Pride Parade on Washington, D.C. took place. A year later, the



nation's capital was again besieged, this time by a highly populated anti-war march.

In 1973, abortion was legalized and by 1974, the country's economy was facing the worst recession 40 years. The U.S. ended the war with North Vietnam 1975 when its troops were withdrawn from Saigon and 1976 marked the 200-year anniversary of the signing the Declaration of Independence. Clashes between returning soldiers of the Vietnam War and noted peace activists like "Hanoi Jane" Fonda created a tension rarely experienced before in previous wars.



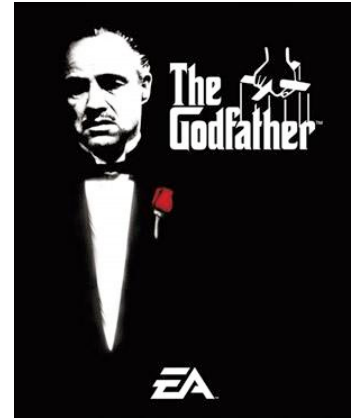
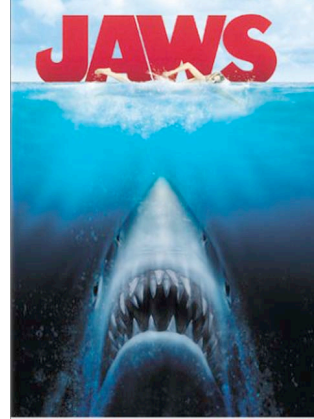
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ENTERTAINMENT



In the entertainment world, *Jaws*, *The Godfather*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Rocky* and *Star Wars* were on the long list of several blockbuster movies. Archie Bunker, Charlie's Angels,

Sonny and Cher, Fred Sanford and Arthur "The Fonz" Fonzerelli were TV idols. Elvis Presley died and The Beatles broke up. There was soft rock, punk rock, hard rock, shock rock, funk,



disco, Afros and bell-bottoms. Led Zeppelin, The Jackson 5, Fleetwood Mac, John Denver, The Eagles, ABBA, B.B. King, The Carpenters, Miles Davis, Willie Nelson and Bob Marley, among numerous others, filled the air waves and helped ease the pain caused by the self-inflicted passing of Janis



Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison. By the early '70's, the hippie movement was alive and well in San Francisco and The Grateful Dead had been playing together for over five years.

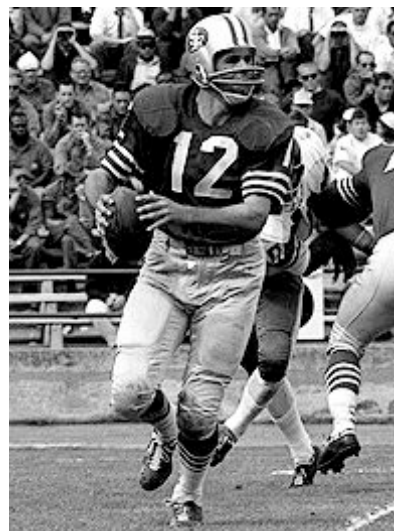
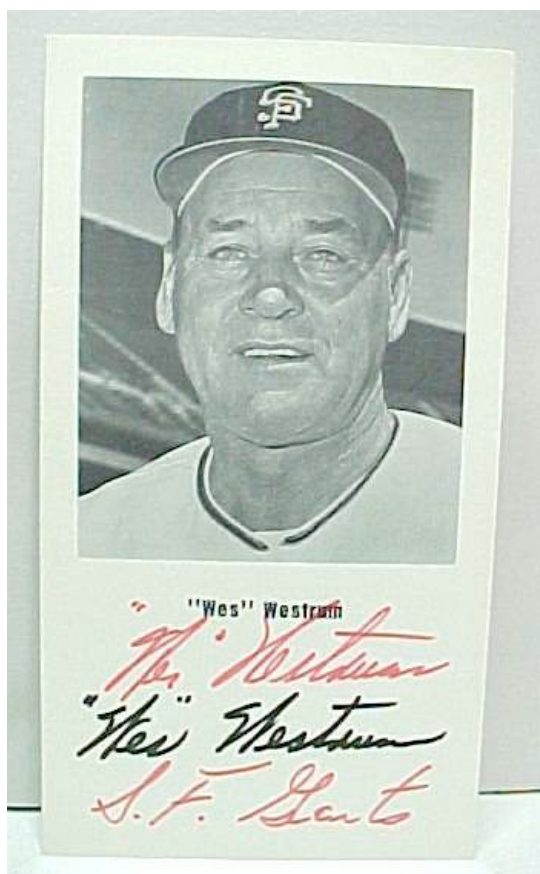
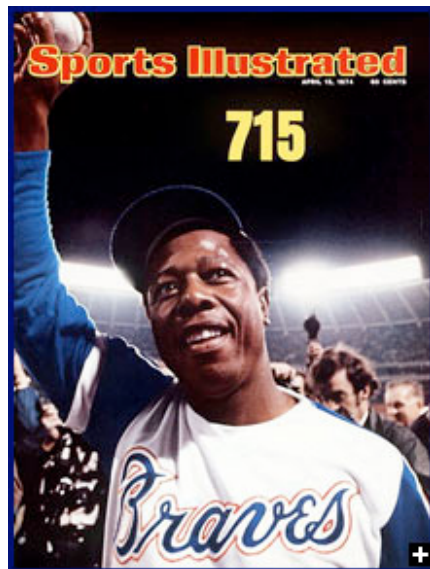
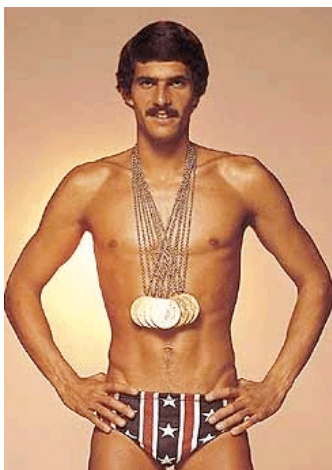


SPORTS

Mark Spitz swam for seven gold medals in the Olympics in 1972 and Hammerin' Hank Aaron hit

home run number 715 in 1974. Clyde King, Wes Westrom and Joe Altobelli managed the San Francisco Giants and John Brodie was still the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers. In basketball, it was Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Earl "The Pearl" Monroe, Dr. Julius Erving and Walt Frazier. The decade of the '70s was such a

mix of personal triumph and defeat, national upheaval and ideological diversity, contrary lifestyles and challenges to the norm, that it gave birth to a solid foundation for systemic change that would continue to influence the nation and the world up to the present.



EDUCATION REFORM

Not to be outdone, education reform was included in the paradigm shift. Vouchers and Charter Schools, Back to Basics “New Math” and Literacy Movements, Early Childhood Education and School Improvement Plans, Equal Education Opportunities and a revamping of Student Aid Programs resonated throughout educational circles effecting every district across the nation. In particular, the Open Education Reform Movement, rooted in the philosophy and practices of the British Primary system, intrigued a group of teachers and their administrator at a neighborhood school then called Ohlones Elementary School in the Palo Alto Unified School District, as early as 1970. This interest blossomed over time into a desire to achieve alternative status as a “School of Choice”.



Ohlone and the Open Education Consortium:

In the seventies, there were about twenty-two neighborhood elementary schools in Palo Alto, three Junior Highs and two High Schools. The staff at Ohlone, as diverse as any other in the district, came together wanting to change the practices they had implemented for many years. Inspired by a common interest in the philosophy and ways of teaching children outlined in the description of an Open Education classroom, the staff elected to become part of a consortium led by Virgil Howes, an educator from England and a proponent of Open Education. This three-year study began in 1971 and included a reflection on common

practices and a look at other possibilities. The examination was grounded in a collection of six principles outlined in the Rights of Children and the twelve Goals of Open Education authored by Howes in his book, Informal Teaching In An Open Education Classroom, published in 1974. These Rights and Goals grew from a viewpoint best described in the first paragraph of the book's Preface and reinforced by the Basic Tenets, Essential Characteristics and Important Support Systems of an Open Education classroom.

INFORMAL TEACHING IN AN OPEN EDUCATION CLASSROOM

“Dramatic changes occur when school is thought of as a way of life rather than a series of programs somehow squeezed into a rigid, timetabled day.”

BASIC TENETS

The thrust of this message emphasizes the importance of a positive classroom and school culture that puts students at its center. This is very aptly expressed in the Basic Tenets of Open Education which embraces the notions of respect for each child, recognition, acceptance and appreciation of each individual and the value of open-ended classroom structures (organization, management, teaching, etc.).

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Essential characteristics of an Open Education classroom include a child-centered curriculum, pupils making real choices, an emphasis on the process of learning, teachers who guide, facilitate, support, connect and question, children who explore their interests, a positive atmosphere that nurtures relationships, collaboration, creativity and supports efforts to meet personal goals.

IMPORTANT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

To support these ideals, the classroom’s physical environment must be rich with a variety of materials, set up differently compared to conventional arrangements and include a less rigid daily schedule along with flexible management. A child’s ideas must be evident in their work and they must experience increased personal responsibility. Student-teacher conferences about progress, work, goals and interests must be frequent and a heterogeneous multi-age grouping of a span from two to three or more years must be a crucial part of the school structure, allowing for positive relationships to develop amongst students, teachers and parents.

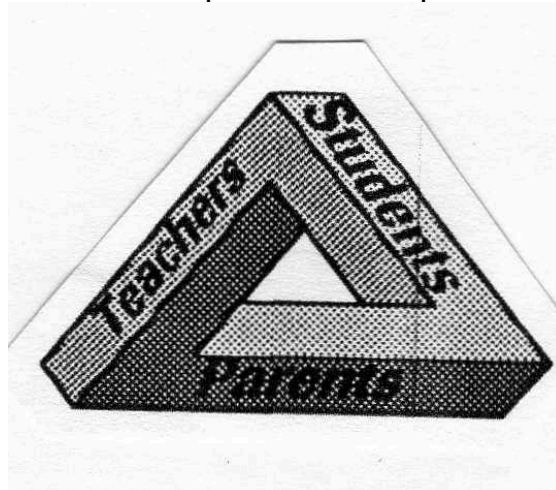


**Image scanned
from school flyer**

THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

These principles and reinforcements led Virgil Howes to the development of The Rights of Children and The Goals of an Open Education listed below.

Children have the right to:

- 1) practice independence and responsibility
- 2) greater freedom and self-direction
- 3) a greater share in shaping the institution of which they are a part
- 4) grow and develop in an atmosphere free from fear and manipulation, psychological and physical
- 5) explore beliefs, value and connections, as important, vital aspects of life
- 6) be involved in the process of learning, not conditioned and manipulated to respond.

These rights help to shape the individual's feelings about himself and others. When fully implemented in the program, structure and conduct of the open classroom, these rights also contribute to the attainment of the goals of open education.

THE GOALS OF AN OPEN EDUCATION

- 1) Children who know themselves as persons with limitations and strengths.
- 2) Children who think independently, act responsibly and are self-propelled.
- 3) Children who use time efficiently and effectively for their own learning and living purposes.
- 4) Children who understand deeply democratic values and beliefs and apply them in daily life.
- 5) Children who show a great concern for other children, valuing the opinions of others in the solutions of problems.
- 6) Children who like themselves and feel good about themselves.
- 7) Children who use their environment and available resources well.
- 8) Children who have healthy egos that are not dependent on or slaves to either the inner or the external worlds.
- 9) Children who like school, want to go to school and are happy in school.
- 10) Children who make more and more learning decisions and accept responsibility for them.
- 11) Children who have confidence in themselves and in their ability to confront and solve problems.
- 12) Children who know how to learn, view learning as worthwhile and think of learning as a lifelong process.

BOARD OF EDUCATION APPROVAL

Along with other influences, these words stood as pillars of the philosophy that influenced decisions made in the classroom and throughout the school by the staff inspired by their meaning. At the conclusion of the consortium, Ohlones teachers, represented by their principal, Jim Mathiott, approached the district and the 1976 Board of Education and requested, with recognition of their new direction, that the school now become a "school of choice", as opposed to a neighborhood school.

The Board deliberated and agreed to designate Ohlones as an "open enrollment" school, a practice that allowed parents throughout the city to get on a waiting list to enroll their child in a school outside their neighborhood boundaries. It's important to note that the Board did acknowledge, but not sanction, that Ohlones was embracing a philosophy and practices related to Open Education Reform principles. Perhaps to do so might imply preference. All the elementary schools in Palo Alto were already excellent schools and continue to carry that reputation today. Regardless, this was the first time ever, but not the last, the Palo

Alto Unified School District supported an alternative school, a "school of choice".

BOARD ROOM - ADMINISTRATION BUILDING 25 CHURCHILL AVENUE, PALO ALTO, CALIF.		PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION		
Time	7:30 P.M., Tuesday March 2, 1976	Recess	9:30 P.M.	
		AGENDA REGULAR MEETING		
BOARD/CABINET STUDY SESSION		5:30 P. M.	(Conference Room)	
IF YOU WISH TO ADDRESS THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, PLEASE SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON REVERSE.				
	Time to be Considered	Person Presenting	Disposition	
1	Call to Order	7:30	Mrs. Morgan	Action
2	Minutes		Mrs. Morgan	Action
	A. February 10, 1976 - Special			
	B. February 17, 1976 - Regular			
3	Personnel Actions		Mrs. Morgan	Action
	A. Classified employees			
4	Approval of Warrants and Budget Transfers		Mrs. Morgan	Action
5	Correspondence from Public	7:40	Mrs. Morgan	Information
	A. Charlotte Jackson Re: Town Meeting '76			
6	Open Forum (See instructions on reverse) Anyone wishing to address the Board on non-agenda items may do so at this time.	7:45	Mrs. Morgan	Information
7	Communications and Reports from Staff	8:00		
	A. Affidavits of Residence and Responsibility Policy		Dr. Toney/ Dr. Lyman	Action
	B. Recognition of Ohlone as District Alternative School		Dr. Walker	Action
	C. ECE Program: Order of School Entry		Mr. Martin	Action
	D. Adoption of Six Project Redesign Operating Goals		Mr. McCollough	Action
	E. Proposed Policy: Physical Abuse		Dr. Toney	Information
	F. Consider Resolution in Support of "Youth Arts Month"		Mr. Martin	Action
	G. Consider Bids for Plumbing (#1537) and Electronic (#1538) Supplies		Mr. St. Cyr	Action
8	Communications and Reports from Board	9:40	Mrs. Morgan	Action
	A. Change in Appointment of BDR			
	B. Other			
9	Executive Session	10:00		
10	Adjournment			

AGENDA ENCLOSURES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW AT ALL PALO ALTO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Calendar of Ohlone School Alternative Program Development 1971 - 1976

SPRING, 1971 Staff and parents discuss new educational directions for the school and decide to ask school board for funding to participate in a three-year consortium of schools in the Bay Area exploring open education.

JUNE 21, 1971 School formally asks the School Board for funding to participate in the Consortium. Funding granted in August, and renewed for the following two years.

SEPT., 1971 - JUNE, 1972 First year of the Consortium
Staff inservice training in open education.
Visits to other schools having open programs.
Parent meetings to explain our changing program.
Staff attends conferences on open education.
Gradual evolution of classroom program: informality, integrated curriculum.
School staff requests and is granted permission to restructure the school week (Minimum day one day per week)
Progress reports presented to parents.
First Annual Report presented to School Board (oral and written).

MAY, 1972 Boundaries between Greendell, Fairmeadow, and Ohlone opened - open enrollment on space availability began.

SEPT., 1972 - JUNE, 1973 Second year of the Consortium
Continued staff inservice training in open education, parent meetings, attending conferences, visits to other schools.
Percent of transfer students: about 8%
Nongrading expanded throughout school.
Some teachers began to have students in class for more than one year.
Staff writes and revises position papers on curriculum areas
Ohlone Parent Advisory Committee organized and developed
Second Annual Report presented to School Board (written).

SEPT., 1973 - JUNE, 1974 Third year of the Consortium of Schools Project
Extensive staff inservice and meetings. Continued visits to other open education schools, attendance at open education conferences, exchange visits.
Individualization of instruction in most curriculum areas.
Parent Advisory Committee in first year of full operation. Three major studies: parent satisfaction, transition to junior high, and teacher needs.
Parent survey taken and results reported.
Movie produced about Ohlone School.
Staff and parents study Early Childhood Education Program and decide to apply to district committee for ranking for inclusion in the program.
Percent of transfer students: about 15%
Third annual report presented to School Board (written).
End of formal consortium of schools project-funding from School Board ended.

SEPT., 1974 - JUNE, 1975
Staff writes manuscript for a book about Ohlone School.
Percent of transfer students rises to 25%
School Board removes boundaries as part of initial closure proposal.
Some teachers try nongraded classes with three-year age span.
Parent Advisory Committee studies school closure issue.
Several staff members give papers at conferences, conduct work shops, consult with other staffs.
Staff and parents prepare Early Childhood proposal, submit it to state. Accepted by state, but district expansion quota not sufficient for inclusion in 1975-76.

SEPT., 1975 - JANUARY, 1976
Percent of transfer students rises to 38%
One-third of students in three-year age span classes
Parent Advisory Committee studies playground/building needs and develops parent survey.

WHAT THE OHLONE ALTERNATIVE LOOKED LIKE

In an attempt to humanize what was, and will always be, an institution, the Ohlones Staff implemented the following classroom and school structures and practices. Each action was intended to create an environment and school culture considered to be more accessible, nurturing and inclusive. Guided by The Rights of Children, The Goals of Open Education, The Basic Tenets, The Essential Characteristics and The Important Support Systems, the Ohlones Staff decided to institute the following features of the new school culture:

- Replace report cards and the letter grade system with a minimum of two Parent and/or Parent/Student Conferences, the use of student work to assess and provide evidence of progress and End of the Year narratives that summarize and supplement the conversations experienced during the conferences and other forms of communication
- Replace the use of bells to signal the beginning and ending of school and recesses with a reliance on responsible adult and student behaviors
- Permission to call staff members by their first names to enhance more personal relationships
- Shorten Wednesday to a minimum day to allow for time to conference (now a district-wide practice)
- Reconfigure classrooms to be multi-aged, a two year span, and commit to a two year experience with the same teacher, as much as possible
- Include parents as volunteers in the classroom, members on decision-making committees and active participants in the maintenance of school-wide programs (Some present-day examples include Noon Art, the Farm and the Harvest Festival, the Back to School and Spring picnics, the Core Values Committee and, of course, the PTA)
- Participate in yearly Retreats designed to reaffirm understanding and dedication to the Open Education principles and practices that influenced the school reform

In addition, the classroom teachers agreed to:

- Create opportunities for meaningful student choice
- Conduct class meetings to discuss plans for the day, engage in discourse, solve problems and/or express personal self
- Teach/learn in small groups, individually and in the large group
- Acknowledge and incorporate student interest in the curriculum
- Allow for movement during the day instead of always sitting in an assigned location
- Form and utilize collaborative groupings
- Diffuse grade level differences by referring to students as youngers and older in the multi-age structure
- Trust the students can go from Point A to Point B without walking in a single file line
- Provide areas in the classroom for certain activities, such as meetings, block play, working on projects, etc.
- Arrange to meet with classrooms of a different age-span for peer tutoring
- Establish heterogeneous academic groups as much as possible
- Embrace play as a significant learning opportunity
- Lower student-to-adult ratio by including classroom aides on a daily basis
- Teach to the “whole child”, intellectual/academic, emotional, social and physical