

## **Washington Elementary Responds to the Competitive Edge Research & Communication Survey**

Washington Elementary is committed to becoming a viable option for the residents of the downtown community and we are thankful for the opportunity to respond to the Competitive Edge Research & Communication Survey of parents and future parents of the 92101 zip code. Although much of the information from the survey is in response to creating a new school for the downtown sector, many of the participants' conversations revolved around current downtown options, namely Washington Elementary. The feedback from the survey has been invaluable toward understanding the wants and needs of the residents while we remain true to our charge of educating all children.

A key concept resulting from the survey is the idea of schools functioning as a "**permeable membrane.**" The term suggests a site that keeps children safe from the undesirable elements that are found in an urban area while still allowing students to benefit from it's resources.

At Washington Elementary we are also concerned about student safety and welfare. Although we are located in one of the safest downtown neighborhoods, we are updating our campus security plans. In February 2009, we conducted a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Site Security Survey through San Diego Unified School District's Police Department. As a result, our plans are to improve the current fencing around the site, add security cameras throughout the campus including parking lots, and move the current main entrance of the school. This will ensure that all visitors have one entry point through the main office. All other access gates will remain locked during the school day.

According to the survey, another key feature of a desirable school is one that is "building community [and a] sense of tradition." This year we have strengthened our partnerships with the **Little Italy Association** and **Convivio's Little Italy Historical Society**. Students are currently working on an oral history project in which they interview residents who share their experience as former students at Washington during the 1940's, 50's, 60's and 70's. The students' reports will be added to the school's website. We will also expand the project to include brochures of the community created by the students using archival material supplied by the historical society and student research. The brochures will focus on the changing face of Little Italy and will be tied to the California History/Social Studies Standards.

The **Little Italy Association** is providing students with opportunities to participate in community events. Last semester students provided artwork for the Gesso Italiano, participated in the Tree Lighting Ceremony and sold handmade ornaments at the Mercato. This semester we have been part of the Carnevale Festival and we look forward to our walkathon, which will inaugurate Little Italy's one-mile marker. Other activities include Festa Siciliano, Artwalk and the Tour d'

Fiori where students will create artwork from organic materials working with the local florist.

Students at all grade levels will be working with the artists from **ArtReach** to prepare for the upcoming **Artwalk/Kidswalk** event. Each project will be grade level appropriate: Kinder and 1<sup>st</sup> grade students will be creating a dream quilt; grades 2 and 3 will work with textures on an Under The Sea project; and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders will work on a project entitled “Cows.”

In addition, all third graders participate in the school-in-residence program at **The New Children’s Museum**. The classroom teachers teach classes at the museum for part of the day and then the children work with the artists to create art based on the museum’s exhibits. The program is ongoing throughout the school year.

Children in the second grade work with the **Mingei International Museum** to learn about art, it’s history and influence. Representatives of the museum visit classrooms to teach children about the importance of art in human history.

Kindergarten students and parents have created a community garden also known as **The KinderGarden**. Its aim to teach children about living things, beautify the campus and eventually they plan to sell their produce at the Mercato, Little Italy’s outdoors farmer’s market.

Although most participants in focus groups one through three had either not heard of Washington or had a general negative feeling toward public schools, some participants in group four had strong opinions about the school.

The survey specifically addressed Washington Elementary with the following question: **“What would Washington School have to do to attract parents and students?”**

The participants in focus group #4 responded: *“improve test scores; tighten down who attends the school (keep it for neighborhood kids rather than bussing kids in); strong, passionate principal and committed teachers; establish an enrichment program that would trump poorer test scores; bridge the language barrier by getting a bilingual teacher; secure higher levels of parental involvement; demonstrate real results by providing data on the number of kids who go to good schools and colleges; ‘see a proven track record of success;’ less transition, more permanence; ensure children’s safety and security; programs that divert/refocus kids into a more constructive path.”*

Under the **leadership** of our new principal, Janie Wardlow, the school is addressing the concerns and perceptions the community may have regarding Washington Elementary. We are working with the district’s various departments to undergo changes to our campus and curriculum.

Changes include creating two smart classrooms that will contain the latest in **technology**. The rooms will house one primary level class (Kindergarten) and one upper grade level classroom (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade). The goal is to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century through teaching and instruction that is dynamic and current. Instruction will continue to become more project based and individualized toward student interests and strengths. We are adding interactive whiteboards, student laptops and desktop computers using mixed platforms. The upgraded technology will allow students to interact with the world around them in new and innovative ways. Eventually all classrooms will become smart classrooms by the end of the 2010-2011 school year.

**Teacher training** is a key component to implementing a successful academic program. Teachers will participate in systematic training addressing the use of the new technology. Training will include the use of Promethean or Smart Boards, Web based learning, project based instruction, online resources, media and communication, the use of Data Director, and other programs. All training will be ongoing and contain components that allow teachers to experiment, collaborate, and monitor their progress. In addition to training, new laptops were purchased and distributed to all fulltime teachers and staff in March of 2009.

The goal of our school is to support children in their areas of need and promote their strengths and interests. At Washington Elementary we are proud of the diversity our students bring to our school. We provide daily English Language Development (ELD) classes for 30 minutes for students who are English Learners. ELD classes are populated based on the children's language proficiency levels. Students who are proficient in English choose **enrichment classes** such as debate, science fair, drama, and the Little Italy Oral History project. Afterschool we provide additional reading support for struggling readers and high interest classes like chess, karate, journalism (a school newspaper), Spanish for beginners, and Latin culture classes for proficient Spanish speakers. In addition fourth and fifth grade students take ballroom dancing on a weekly basis throughout the school year as part of their physical education program.

We are committed to helping the community get a true picture of our site. Twice a month on Fridays the principal conducts school tours for interested parents and community members. We are also making efforts to reach out to builders, homeowner associations and real estate agents in the area to share with them what the school has to offer. In the past two months we have created a recruitment folder that contains new brochures for the school, PTO and the community of Little Italy. The folder also provides information on our partners like the Mingei and New Children's Museum.

Washington Elementary is building its profile in the downtown community by strengthening its ties with its cultural and business partners. We want the public to see us as open to change and willing to listen and respond to the community's

needs. We feel we are moving forward to becoming the “permeable membrane” the community has asked for. We have started the momentum toward change and we look forward to serving the needs of all of downtown’s children.