

SUMMER
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PANTHER PAGES

Piedmont Avenue Elementary School's Newsletter

African Heritage Night Celebrates Campus Diversity

If you've visited our school, you know that Piedmont Avenue Elementary School (PAES) is home to a spirited and diverse group of students. What you may not know is how richly diverse they are: Not only could you hear, at any moment, one of 17 different languages, but you might also be sharing the hallway with royalty: Kindergartener James's grandfather, for example, was a king in the African country of Madagascar.

To celebrate and share our students' and families' unique backgrounds, we host inspiring monthly multicultural events. In this newsletter edition, we spotlight February's African Heritage Celebration.

Marcus Gary, whose two sons attend PAES, has helped coordinate the event four years running. "The focus this year was to highlight African culture all the way back to ancient kings and queens," he explains, "with the whole celebration tied into the richness of African culture... and acknowledging the ancestors before us who paved the way."

Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Senegal, are just a few of the African countries represented on campus.

To pay tribute to them all, the night's festivities included a fashion show, with students and families wearing different African garb. There was also drumming and dancing, which 2nd-grader Trinity fondly recalls. "We did African dancing," she says, "and I did my most signature move ever." (She demonstrated the elaborate step on the playground during this interview.) "The night was



nice because everyone got together as a group. It was really nice to be there, getting to see all the people and dancing on stage."

Later, Gary told an Egyptian allegory to the students. "I did a story called the Story of Ausar," he says. "It's a metaphor about what goes on in everybody's lives – their trials and tribulations – and how, when we're confronted with challenges, you need to have the will to follow what's right within you, as opposed to choosing the wrong path."

PAES students then took center stage, presenting their winning Martin Luther King, Jr. Oratorical Contest entries. Both of Gary's sons performed, with 4th-grader Kunta Anghk Heru Men reciting King's "I Have a Dream." His kindergarten son, Neranti, performed Langston Hughes's "I, Too, Sing America." And 2nd-grader Penelope recited her original poem, "Freedom."

3rd-grader Darian, who says the speeches were his favorite part of the evening, is effusive in his praise of the young orators. "He was amazing!" he says about Neranti. "Everyone was. They all remembered all their lines."

"It felt good [to recite the poem in front of the school]," reflects Neranti. "I had a lot of fun." He was also proud to share the powerful words of Langston Hughes. "Hughes did a lot of good poems," he says. Neranti hasn't forgotten those words, either: During the interview for this newsletter, he broke into a full recital of the poem, from memory, right there on the playground.

Gary recognizes the school-wide effort it took to organize – and attend this memorable event. "It was standing-room only," says Gary. "That auditorium was full. It was so lively, there was so much energy behind it all, and I heard from parents afterward about how great an event it was."

WELCOME!

A big Piedmont Avenue Elementary School welcome to our incoming kindergarteners and other new students. If your child is entering PAES in the fall and you have not yet toured the school or met Ms. Ahmad, call 510-654-7377 to arrange a visit!

Dads Club Getting Fathers Involved

When it comes to parent groups on school campuses, people tend to think of women first. (In fact, the first Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was founded as the National Congress of Mothers.) But at Piedmont Avenue Elementary School, the Dads Club is painting a different, more all-inclusive picture of family involvement.

Introduced three years ago by Steve Nation, Pastor of the Oakland Worship Center from the Community, the Dads Club started small, taking on smaller projects the PTA needed help with. Since then, says Dads Club President Edward O'Tey, the group has grown, adding more and more fathers and taking on bigger projects.

One of this year's crowning achievements was the Father-Daughter Dance. "What's unique about it is it's for the girls to have a bonding experience with their fathers," says O'Tey. "You don't usually see that kind of event at schools. It's really a nice moment for PAES fathers and daughters." Not to be left out, some sons lent a hand: O'Tey's 5th-grade son, Jason, was the dance's guest DJ.

Among the other projects the group has headed up: Painting the tables out on the yard, resurrecting the school's butterfly garden, hosting a clean-up day to improve the campus's landscaping, running a basketball tournament, supporting PAES's Oratorical Contest participants, and



1st-grader Christopher and his father, Akintunde Wali, model clothing from Nigeria in the fashion show during African Heritage Night.

building raised beds for the school garden.

O'Tey and the rest of the Dads Club look forward to even bigger things next year and beyond. "It's definitely growing and there's a Walk to School group we connect with and that helps bring in parents who don't know much about the school, or are new to the area," he says. "The Dads Club and the PTA are both looking to reach out to [others in the community] and show them our school."

CONGRATULATIONS!

2nd-grader Penelope was the only Oakland K-2 student to win an Oratorical Award in the "Original Poetry" category.

She brought her piece to the Oakland Finals at Acts Full Gospel Church, where she took the big stage to share her poem before an audience of hundreds!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Kindergarten Orientation

Friday, August 27 at 1:00pm.

ENROLLMENT

If you are interested in enrolling your child at Piedmont Avenue Elementary, please call OUSD's Student Assignment office at 510-434-7780. If you would like to take a tour of our school, please call Principal Ahmad at 510-654-7377.

GET INVOLVED

If you'd like to volunteer at Piedmont Avenue Elementary, please call 510-654-7377 to set up a meeting with Principal Ahmad.

SUPPORT PIEDMONT AVENUE ELEMENTARY!

Everyone on our campus – staff, families, volunteers – is committed to offering our kids all the resources they deserve.

Through our PTA, we have held several successful fundraisers, but state cuts have reduced our public school budget significantly as we head into 2010-11. To fill the financial gaps, we appeal to the wider community. You can help!

To make a tax-deductible donation, visit www.oaklandschoolsfoundation.org (designating "Piedmont Avenue Elementary") or send a check to "OSF/PAE," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

Thank you for your support!



PIEDMONT AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

4314 Piedmont Avenue, Oakland, CA 94611
Phone: 510-654-7377 • Fax: 510-654-7309
Zarina Ahmad, Principal
zarina.ahmad@ousd.k12.ca.us
www.paesonline.com



Piedmont Avenue Elementary is a member of the OSF Network

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