

# The Greenleaf Scholar

GREENLEAF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NEWSLETTER | FALL 2009

## Who Wants to Be a Greenleaf Scholar?

Looking for a fresh approach to a Friday afternoon assembly, Greenleaf Elementary School's staff hit upon a creative idea during a meeting last spring: a game-show format that would unite students while also prepping them for the California Standards Test (CST). Clad in their "Yes We Can!" shirts, the K-5 students became contestants in Greenleaf's version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

Questions involved antonyms, prime numbers, and, as the stakes got higher, more challenging topics that made this *Greenleaf Scholar* reporter scratch his head, like the question about degrees in a triangle. Greenleaf scholars breezed through the answers to quickly reach the \$1 million dollar question, which Principal Monica Thomas posed to all: "Who is going to rock the CST?!" In unison, 475 students filled the auditorium with the answer: "We are!"

After answering the final question, students got another thrill. Their teachers, who'd been hiding in the wings, burst down the aisle in over-the-top costumes and hats, waving pom-poms and cheering on the young scholars. Students exited to the sounds of "Celebration," a song the staff was happy to cue up again when test results were recently released: Based on CST scores, Greenleaf's Academic Performance Index (API) rose 47 points to 777 in 2008-09!

To put this in perspective, a score of 800 is considered the "magic number" for high-achieving schools – and Greenleaf is nearly there after just its second year! What's more, the achievement comes on the heels of unprecedented success in 2007-08, when Greenleaf's 730 API was the highest ever for a small Oakland school in its first year!



### Greenleaf's Vision Statement:

Academic excellence is our goal. Community is our foundation. Together, we work and live by the Greenleaf principles of learning: Integrity, Determination, Pride, and Inquiry.

"We're doing what people say can't be done in East Oakland," says Thomas. "It's totally happening, because our kids and teachers and parents are working so hard. We set clear, high goals and we're determined." Congratulations to all!



# Family Engagement: Community is Our Foundation

As the vision statement reads, community is the foundation for Greenleaf's ambitious goals, and it all starts with families. Greenleaf Outreach Coordinator Rodolfo Perez is part of the school-wide commitment to involving and empowering all members of the campus community. "We made it a priority to really develop, in concrete ways, our parent involvement on campus last year," says Perez.



Community events such as Back to School Night, Family Reading Night, and multicultural events give families a chance to participate, and the school's Parent Center offers workshops and computer classes for parents as well. Another key, says Perez, was the nomination of Parent Representatives for each classroom. These parents meet with Principal Monica Thomas once a month to weigh in on issues affecting their kids and the school overall.

"We interview parents and teachers to find out how to form better parent-teacher partnerships," Perez says. "And we really recognize the contributions of parents." Case in point: Parent Appreciation Day, which drew close to 100 people last year and featured an appreciation lunch for families, plus certificates

for classroom reps and parents who volunteered in classrooms.

Sara Cantu and Jose Duran, parents of Kindergartner Manuel, 1st-grader Bremelyn, and departing 5th-grader Gilber, say their children's teachers have helped them get involved "by welcoming us in the classroom as class helpers, by always having someone to translate for us in communicating with teachers, if needed, and by offering extra help such as the after-school programs."

Araceli Terrazas, whose children Emiliano and Alexander are in Kindergarten and 2nd grade, says Greenleaf has "[helped] us in our personal growth, higher self-esteem, and in forming a good sense of community." Cantu and Duran attribute their son's academic growth at Greenleaf to this community spirit and communication among parents, teachers, and students. "[Our] son Gilber came in as a 4th-grader from another school very low in English," recall his parents. "And in two years [at Greenleaf], he graduated dominating the language."

3rd-grader Giselle says her father Jose Pureco works with her every day. "My father helped me at home by being with me when doing homework and by reviewing my work daily," she says. "I feel proud of myself [for improving academically]."

Parents have also been empowered to lead the effort in getting the school a new building. Families assessed the building and playground last year, says Perez, and resolved to take up the cause with the school board. "It's 100 percent asphalt, fences are falling down, and there are zero trees," says Perez. A group of parent representatives explained this and other issues to Greenleaf's school board rep, and are hopeful to at least make headway on a new playground this year. "We'd like to have a little paradise out there," says Perez.

Photography ©2009 Hasain Rasheed



## SUPPORT GREENLEAF!

As our families become more and more involved at school, we have begun to outgrow our Parent Center, which needs not only more staff but also computers and other resources. Our public school budget does not cover any of this, so we must fundraise to fill in the gaps. You can donate online at [www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org) (designating "Greenleaf") or by sending a check to "OSSF/Greenleaf," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620. Thank you!



**OAKLAND  
SMALL SCHOOLS  
FOUNDATION**

Resources > Opportunity > Excellence

Greenleaf Elementary is a member of the Oakland Small Schools Foundation network  
[www.smallschoolsfoundation.org](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org)



6328 E 17th Street  
Oakland, CA 94621  
Principal Monica Thomas  
510-636-1400  
[Monica.Thomas@ousd.k12.ca.us](mailto:Monica.Thomas@ousd.k12.ca.us)  
[www.smallschoolsfoundation.org/greenleaf](http://www.smallschoolsfoundation.org/greenleaf)