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Ánimo Legacy:

*A Tradition of Excellence,
A Dedication to Success*

Green Dot takes the next big leap to improve
educational outcomes



Improving Outcomes for Students

Ánimo Phillis Wheatley and Ánimo Western Charter Middle Schools unite to build a new legacy

BY COREY RODDA

Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School is a site of transformation where students are provided the support and resources they need to thrive. Like its students, the middle school isn't afraid to embark on change, especially when change leads to growth. This fall, Ánimo Western Charter Middle School (WRN) and Ánimo Phillis Wheatley Charter Middle School (APW) will be unified.

This fusion is the last in a line of several changes to provide students with an improved educational experience that prepares them for college, leadership and life. In 2011, Green Dot was awarded control of Henry Clay Middle School. At the time, Clay was one of the lowest performing middle schools in California, rife with substitute teachers and classroom disruptions.

"It was slowly losing enrollment over time, which is a key indication that families no longer had confidence in the education that the school was providing to their students," said President and Chief Executive Officer of Green Dot Public Schools California, Cristina de Jesus.

Under Green Dot's leadership, Henry Clay Middle School was split into two campuses. Since then, enrollment increased by 30% and the Ánimo middle schools have attracted statewide attention, accreditation, and awards for the year-to-year educational growth that its students have achieved.

"We were able to bring in a program that was very structured on accelerating student learning while also catching them up," said de Jesus. "We were able to bring in an environment that was focused on high care, high expectations and high structure."

Now school leaders believe that unifying Ánimo Western Charter Middle School and Ánimo Phillis Wheatley Charter Middle School will enable the schools to further catalyze educational growth on campus.

"We can combine resources across campuses and ensure that Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School has solid systems of collaboration that allow us to maximize our support for students," said de Jesus.

Though the two middle schools will be unified, Ánimo Legacy will still possess a small school feel through a grade level support system called the Cohort Model in which groups of 150 students share the same history, math, science and English teachers. Ánimo Legacy will be divided into zones, separated by grade level so that teachers and school leaders can hone in on social, emotional, and

"We were able to bring in an environment that was focused on high care, high expectations and high structure."

Cristina de Jesus
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Green Dot Public Schools
California



CEO Cristina de Jesus
PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

academic needs of students as they move from sixth to eighth grade.

Initially, many parents expressed concern that this change would return Henry Clay to a chaotic learning environment. But, once

school leaders outlined how the unification would bolster support and preserve small class sizes, parents relaxed. Their most pressing questions shifted from how their children would be served by the new school to practical questions about school uniforms and holiday schedules.

"Once we were able to break down for them how the new model would work, parents were nodding and smiling," said de Jesus.

Ánimo Legacy's Achievements

30% boost in student enrollment — enabling Clay to elaborate and expand upon its course offerings for English Learners and students with disabilities.

75% reduction in out-of-school suspensions.

African American students, Latinx students, students with disabilities, and English language learners **achieved above average year-to-year growth in English and math** compared to similar students across the golden state.

When Two Schools **Unify**

Student achievement soared when Green Dot arrived

BY COREY RODDA

Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School implements the Cohort Model of education which focuses on more than academics—serving students holistically. Principal Sonja Johnson said, “We’re a small school, and we want to keep the same small school feel in a large and more comprehensive middle school.”

The Cohort Model arranges sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students into “cohorts” or “corps,” which act like smaller learning communities. “This allows for a lower student-to-teacher ratio with a maximum of

“We’re a small school, and we want to keep the same small school feel in a large and more comprehensive middle school.”

Sonja Johnson
Principal, Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School

33 students and an average of 25 per class.

The sixth grade will have two cohorts, and seventh and eighth grades will have three cohorts,” said Marcus Reynolds, Ánimo Legacy Assistant Principal.

“These cohorts allow us to address students’ needs on a much more personalized level,” added Johnson.

“Students in middle school are learning about themselves, their identity, and finding out who they are in addition to their academic studies. This model allows our students to dig deeper.”

This type of personalization better serves students with special needs who make up more than 15 % of the student body. They learn

in mainstream classes depending on their level of need. Special day classes, two autism classes and resource specialist programs are also provided. “When they’re in their general education classes, advisors and volunteers accompany them in those classroom,” Reynolds said.

Other than the Cohort Model, Principal Johnson reiterated the importance of the students’ social-emotional development, “At our school, we’re all about changing habits of the mind. How do you begin to have students practice a growth mindset? How do you begin to have students really think through the choices that they’re making and understand the impact of those choices?”

With the unified campus, all Ánimo Legacy students greatly benefit from these services. With a growth mindset, every learning experience is an opportunity to excel.



Principal Sonja Johnson and Assistant Principal Marcus Reynolds

PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

New Course Offerings

21st Century Problem Solving Courses.

In these courses, students solve relevant problems using literacy, digital tools, and the design process.

- **Course 1:** Introduction to Engineering and Computer Science.
- **Course 2:** Intermediate Computer Science and Introductory Biomedical Science
- **Course 3:** Robotics.

During the 2019-2020 school year, students will have access to Course 1: Introduction to Engineering and Computer Science.

21st Century Leadership and Life Courses.

These courses focus on techniques of problem-solving using literacy, digital tools, and the design process—essential critical thinking skills.

Class activities may be designed around themes of diversity, identity, and social justice. They will include comprehensive reading, writing, and analysis through different perspectives. The curriculum centers on the development of learning and innovative skills. Additionally, life and career skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking are taught.

Creating a Growth Mindset

Support and engagement in middle school yields far-reaching outcomes

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

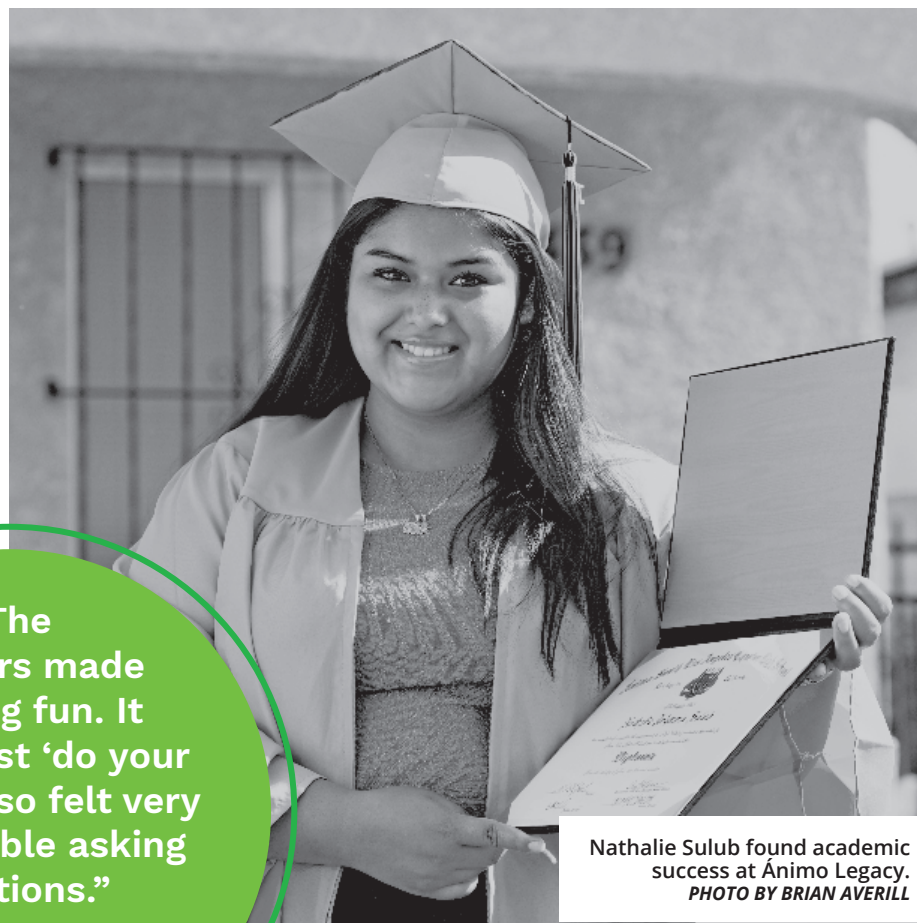
Nathalie Sulub, 17, always knew she wanted to be a veterinarian. But her years at Ánimo Phillis Wheatley Charter Middle School solidified her dream. Ánimo Phillis Wheatley also prepared her for high school and — now — college where she is on the path to making this dream a reality.

“I intended to follow this path since I was a child,” said Sulub, who is currently a biochemistry major at California State University, Dominguez Hills. “But my middle school really motivated me.”

At Ánimo Phillis Wheatley, Sulub thrived; she recalled enjoying school and looking forward to her classes. “Middle school was pretty fun, actually,” Sulub said. “The teachers made learning fun. It wasn’t just ‘do your work.’ I also felt very comfortable asking questions.”

This engaging and personal approach has grown as Ánimo Phillis Wheatley and Ánimo Western merged to create Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School, according to Principal Sonja Johnson. “Our model is really about having a small-school feel on a large campus,” she said. “It allows us to break down sixth, seventh and eighth grade levels into smaller ‘cohorts’ that support collaboration with teachers and pushes the level of rigor. It also stresses community and collective growth.”

Sulub’s experiences at Ánimo Phillis Wheatley have supported her greatly on her road to college. In fact, Sulub feels her



“The teachers made learning fun. It wasn’t just ‘do your work.’ I also felt very comfortable asking questions.”

Nathalie Sulub
Alumna, Ánimo Phillis Wheatley
Charter Middle School

Nathalie Sulub found academic success at Ánimo Legacy.
PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

experience at Ánimo Phillis Wheatley, and her close relationships with teachers, helped her avoid distractions in high school, where it is common for female students to disengage from math and science. “My math teachers at Ánimo Phillis Wheatley were very helpful, and I was well prepared to attend Ánimo South Los Angeles Charter High School,” said Sulub. “The counselors also did a lot for me there.”

Johnson knows that keeping all students on a path to college requires more than rigorous academics, but also ample supports and opportunities to grow. “Students in middle school are learning about themselves, their

identity and finding out about who they are, in addition to the academic teaching that happens in school,” said Johnson. “It’s important to support the students’ lives at this [critical] phase in life. How do you begin to have students practice a growth mindset? How do you begin to have students really think through the choices that they’re making and understand the impact of those choices — and to begin to do things differently in order to have different outcomes?”

In Sulub’s case, the mindset she developed at her Green Dot middle school supports her as she navigates life at a four-year university. “Stick to what you’re studying and don’t get sidetracked,” said Sulub. “No matter what people say, stick to your plan.”

A Winning Combination

Tianna Williams, the sixth grade counselor at Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School, believes the joining of the two campuses has greatly benefited students, families, and staff.

“There will now be an opportunity for students from both campuses to spend time together,” she said. “But also, the school [has been] restructured so the students are in their own cohorts — what we refer to as ‘houses’ — so even with 1,000 kids on campus, students experience the feeling of being in a small school.”

The cohorts also allow parents to know exactly what classes, teachers, and counselors their children will have, and makes it easy to communicate. But perhaps most importantly, the structure ensures small class sizes.

“
The average
class size is
25
students.

Small classes allow teachers to **(a)** get to know their students on a personal level, and **(b)**, give students the individualized attention they need.

College Preparation

At Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School, we are preparing all students for college, leadership, and life. For teachers, this mission is achieved by meeting students where they are – 85% of incoming students are three to four grade levels behind in English and math.

“For students who are below grade level, we double down on interventions,” said Annette Gonzalez, Chief Academic Officer at Green Dot Public Schools. “If you come into sixth grade and you are reading below grade level, you are going to get sixth grade level courses and literacy intervention or math intervention so that you can grow your skills.”

These intervention courses boast a blended curriculum – with a teacher and online services so that students with differing skill levels can succeed in the same classroom.

“Our middle school model is about intervention as needed so that you can be high school ready and prepared for every educational opportunity that your high school has to offer,” said Gonzalez.

Ánimo Legacy’s ultimate goal is to prepare its students to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) and honors high school courses; with an eye for what their dedication could yield. Teachers post their alma matter outside each classroom door; and during college field trips, students explore high-tech labs and university campuses.

Keeping A Promise

An environment focused on academics where students can learn and grow is a hallmark of a good school

BY COREY RODDA

Since the two schools unified, Adriana Figueroa — who is now in eighth grade — has come to appreciate the supportive adults who have made her academic life a little smoother.

“There are a lot of people that help me on the new campus,” she said. “The security guards, the teachers and the principal, and the people that take attendance.”

Adriana is still getting to know her fellow eighth graders — half of whom attended Ánimo Phillis Wheatley Charter Middle School while she studied at Ánimo Western Charter Middle School — and enjoys bonding with her peers in the eighth grade zone. At the new campus, each grade is granted a zone where the students attend classes.

“The zone is only for eighth graders,” Figueroa said. “I think it’s cool that we have our own space.”

Adriana said that she was talking about Ánimo Legacy with her cousin recently. When comparing their middle school experiences, Adriana realized that she appreciated the sense of safety and care that has framed her educational experience.

“I just feel more secure at Green Dot,” she said.

Before she attended Ánimo Legacy, she was bullied in elementary school and spoke to her principal about it. The school did not intervene. But at Ánimo Legacy, she said, teachers and administrators pay attention to her needs on and off school grounds.

When she first started at Ánimo Legacy, Adriana was overwhelmed by her teachers’ expectations. But with the help of her teachers,



Eighth grade student, Adriana Figueroa finds the teachers at Ánimo Legacy attentive to her personal and academic needs.

PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

“I just feel more secure at Green Dot.”

Adriana Figueroa
Eighth Grader, Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School

she learned how to ask clarifying questions in class and to seek after-school tutoring when she needs it.

“The first year in middle school was really hard,” she said.

“I didn’t know the campus and I had to learn where everything was. It was hard to keep up my grades, but now it’s easier to [handle] everything.”

Adriana’s mother passed away while she was at Ánimo Legacy and her teachers helped her stay on top of her school work while she coped with grief. Adriana promised her mom

before she died that she would graduate from college.

“I think it is so important to go because college will determine your future,” Adriana said.

Now she is hard at work maintaining her GPA. Her eyes are on high school, but she’s savoring her time at Green Dot.

“Because it is my last year in middle school, I am going to end a big chapter,” she said. “I’m going to go to ... high school and then, I am going to college because that is what I promised my mom.”



Ánimo Legacy parent Brittney Roberts with her daughters Brooklyn (8th grade), and Britain (7th grade)
PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

Serving the Whole Student

Ánimo Legacy recognizes that students are individuals with emotional lives, circumstances and talents that extend beyond their academic career. Ánimo Legacy strives to create a safe and welcoming campus that provides students a variety of supports and resources to help them navigate middle school and prepare them for high school and life beyond.

Relationships

Ánimo Legacy teachers know students by their names. Students have multiple adults on campus who know them well. These relationships create fertile foundations for students to grow intellectually and emotionally, and to tap into joyful pastimes.

Advisory

Every student is assigned to an advisory class. Advisory meets three mornings per week and functions as a home base throughout a student's time in middle school. In these classes, students are immersed in a social emotional learning curriculum. The curriculum is designed to empower students to effectively navigate situations beyond the classroom. Students learn to reflect and solve problems with sensitivity.

Extracurriculars

Whether they choose to get involved with student government or to start a new club on campus, there are many ways for students to become leaders at Ánimo Legacy. Students can join one of the existing programs on campus like dance, soccer, or art club, or they can work with a teacher sponsor to start a new club.

Going Beyond Academics

Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School offers a wide array of clubs and after-school programs

BY COREY RODDA

At Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School, students can take a break from paragraph construction and linear algebra by joining a bevy of after-school sports, arts, and personal enrichment clubs.

These clubs introduce students to potential life-long passions and hone their ability to balance academia with other activities—activities that might make them stand out among a pool of college or job applications.

English Language Arts teacher Delaina Simpson reflected on the valuable lessons in teamwork that she learned from playing on her middle school basketball team when she was younger. She loves

watching Ánimo Legacy students grow and flourish when participating in extracurricular activities.

"The students who participate in these programs mature, they take responsibility, [and] they are more academically and socially aware. These are important skills," Simpson said.

"They learn how to get along with one another. They understand that they can still be themselves despite having differences with others."

Last year, Ánimo Legacy parent, Brittney Robert's daughters, Brooklyn and

Britain, joined the dance and theatre clubs at Ánimo Legacy. Roberts reflected that the experiences helped her children adjust to

"The students who participate in these programs mature, they take responsibility, and they are more academically and socially aware."

Delaina Simpson

English and Language Arts Teacher,
Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School

1

The new campus will build upon the strengths of Ánimo Western Charter Middle School and Ánimo Phillis Wheatley Charter Middle School to accelerate student growth.

2

The Cohort Model creates small learning communities of 150 students. Each Cohort shares common teachers throughout their years at Ánimo Legacy.

3

Connecting with staff has never been easier. Parents can collaborate with the four teachers that lead their student's Cohort, or speak with the two assistant principals and counselor who support their grade level.

9

New electives focus on teaching STEM skills. The "21st Century Leadership and Life" elective investigates issues of identity, culture, and social justice through design and digital tools. The "21st Century Problem Solving" electives build a foundation of engineering and computer science.

Top 10

Benefits of the Unified Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School

BY COREY RODDA

4

Cohort teachers work together to support a student's entire academic wellbeing.

Collaboration and connection amongst teachers improves students' growth and success.

5

Ánimo Legacy expands course offerings and specialized support for students with disabilities.

8

Unifying the campus means more resources for students. Therefore, the combined campus will be more resourced to serve students in need of more individualized attention.

The unified campus allows teachers to specialize, collaborate, and focus on teaching so students receive the highest quality instruction.

6

The newly unified campus will capitalize on the talents of the Ánimo Legacy staff.

10

A unified campus creates more space for classroom learning and extracurricular activities.

7

The Ánimo Legacy campus is organized into zones by grade level. Zones operate like mini schools. Designated areas of campus optimize safety, streamline passing periods, and allow leaders to focus on the unique social, emotional, and academic needs of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.



Your Children Matter Most

Put your student on the path to success at Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School.

Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School continues a series of improvements for its students through the unification of Ánimo Phillis Wheatley and Ánimo Western campuses. Increased enrollment, decreased suspensions, more individualized attention, and fewer students per classroom are among the many successes Ánimo Legacy has celebrated since joining the Green Dot network of schools.

Community programs to build student leadership and life skills

Career Assessment to direct student potential and steer them to better opportunities

Academic advising to support students on their road to college

Wrap-around services

- Mental health supports
- Psychological services
- Counseling groups
- Mentoring groups
- Community partners for health and wellness programs.

Stay Connected

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