



An
Education
That
Starts at
Home



Where parents
choose and students
succeed

Ocean Grove Charter School

Where parents choose and students succeed

BY ANNE STOKES

At Ocean Grove Charter School, educators put the power of choice into families' hands. The home-based personalized learning charter school provides students with alternatives to the traditional educational system and gives parents the tools and support they need to help their children succeed.

"Our organization is really built around [the] vision that every single child is different – they have different interests, they have different abilities ... they learn at different paces," says Susan Clark, executive director of Innovative Education Management, the nonprofit public benefit corporation that operates Ocean Grove and two other personalized learning California charter schools. "Each student has a program that's specially designed for them. If you couple that with giving parents as much decision-making as you can in the education of their own child, those two things together are going to create lifelong learners and contributing members of society."

First opened in 1999, IEM now serves nearly 6,000 students in Northern, Central and Southern California. They provide home-schooling support for elementary and middle school students and independent learning programs for high school students. According to Clark, the fact that their schools have been around for nearly 20 years reassures parents seeking educational options.

"We've been in business a long time ... and we know the rules and regulations of charter schools," she says.

"Our historic stability [and] our clean audits guarantee for parents that this school is going to be here tomorrow, it's going to be here next year, it's going to be here five years from now."

With IEM, home-schooling families can connect with 4,000 different vendors through which they can choose the curriculum, materials, programs and other educational resources that best suit their children's needs and learning styles. Ocean Grove Charter School supports both students and parents with diagnostic assessments, curriculum recommendations, tutoring and parent trainings.

"Together [teachers and parents] choose what books might be best, what supplements might be best, what services they might need – it's truly a collaboration between the teacher and the parent," says Clark. "We're not cookie cutter. You can talk to 10 different families and you will find 10 different ways that they're reaching students."

Whether students have specialized needs that aren't easily addressed in a brick-and-mortar classroom or crave a more advanced curriculum, Ocean Grove Charter School can provide the means for them to excel.

"These kids are really getting such an independently designed program that gives them the option to move at any pace," says Clark. "We're able to really meet the needs of just about any student there is."

According to Susan Clark, IEM executive director, students who may not fit into a traditional educational environment can find success at Ocean Grove Charter School through personalized attention and customized curriculum. "We believe we can serve any student," she says.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



"We're able to really meet the needs of just about any student there is."

Susan Clark
Innovative Education Management
Executive Director



MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOUR FAMILY

While a traditional classroom with one teacher and dozens of students may work for some students, many don't fit that mold. Many parents aren't aware of any other options.

Charter schools like Ocean Grove exist to give parents a choice in their child's education. "We believe that the old model of education

where every child must learn from the same book does not meet the needs of all students," says Cynthia Rachel, director of education support services. "We want to help parents educate their children in a way that meets their children's needs. This may be different for every child."

As a public school, Ocean Grove:

- Is FREE (no tuition)
- Is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges
- Accepts any student living within Santa Cruz and adjacent counties

- Allows for flexible daily schedules
- Offers curricular choices to suit students' needs
- Provides support from credentialed teachers

To see if Ocean Grove is right for your family, visit www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.

**“They
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**Bethany Coffey
Ocean Grove parent**

Through home schooling, Bethany Coffey can structure her children's education around their strengths and interests, including incorporating projects, field trips and extracurricular activities into their flexible curriculum.
PHOTO BY CHIP HOLLEY

The Freedom to Follow Student's Passions

Home schooling puts parents in charge of their child's education

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Bethany Coffey, a Santa Cruz mother of four, never planned to home-school. But when her first child, Tori, started preschool, the teacher told Coffey she wouldn't thrive in a traditional classroom. "I started to research my options and I fell in love with the idea," she says.

She now home-schools both Tori, age 11, and her brother Josiah, 8, through Ocean Grove Charter School. The one-on-one instruction also lets her figure out how her children's brains work and pick up on all the little clues that might be lost in a large classroom. "People ask what I use for curriculum, and it changes every year," Coffey says. "If I see they dread something, I look for a different method."

The flexible curriculum allows her to follow the children's interests and structure the day around what they want to learn. "If something is going great – they are really on a writing streak or really into a book we're reading – I just continue on with it."

She also is able to build on their curiosity about many different subjects. "They had a lot of questions about space this past year," she says. "So we watched NASA videos [and] used a Galileo telescope." Another major theme was *"The Hobbit,"* which they listened to as an audiobook. "All their activities began to revolve around that story – their Lego building, their

dress-up, their imaginative play – even my younger daughter participated," Coffey says. In fact, it is this family bonding she appreciates most. "Everyone is learning the same thing, talking about the same thing," she says. "I feel our family really knows each other well."

The family also extends learning by taking field trips as much as possible. Often these field trips are taken with their large group of home-schooling friends. "We get together regularly," she says. "There are 25 kids, ranging from 5 to 13, and they all come up with games and play together. We don't have to direct their play."

Coffey suggests this personalized educational approach makes her kids eager to learn. "They have time to think and to wonder, to read and enjoy," she says. They also have time to explore extracurricular activities, art and gymnastics, for instance, as well as commit to a passion. "My daughter takes ballet," Coffey says. "And I love that she's not worrying about homework. Other girls are in the back, doing their homework, and she can just enjoy dancing."

See how can Ocean Grove Charter School help your children explore their passions at www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.



IS HOME SCHOOLING RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Home schooling your children can be hard – but rewarding – work!

According to Mary Ann Shapiro, education specialist advisor, successful home-schooling families usually have a complete dedication to their children's education.

"If you're going to raise and educate your children well, you're going to work really hard. And you have to reprioritize your life," she says. "But it's also a wonderful thing. You have a family that is very stable ... and they remain 'your' children, not the school's children."

As the mother of adult kids who were home-schooled, Shapiro also has the benefit of a long-term view. "You give them the ability to be the best people they can be, without the pressure of peers," she says. "Without that conflict, they don't have the great angst of most teens. They are independent and very successful."

Being Social

Family finds that opportunities abound

BY MATT JOCKS



“[Ocean Grove] is trying to make the whole individual learning approach very user-friendly.”

Tiffany Nagel
Ocean Grove parent

Twins Danielle and David Nagel have found plenty of opportunities to socialize with peers, both with and outside of the home-schooling community, such as working with younger children at art classes at their local church.

PHOTO BY CHIP HOLLEY

Tiffany Nagel was confident she was right, but that didn't mean she wasn't nervous. Pulling her twins out of the public school system and putting them into home schooling was a big move.

“I had a lot of apprehension,” Nagel says. “It’s a little scary going against the stream of what society expects, and we didn’t really know what we were doing at first.”

Initially Nagel wasn't concerned about the opportunities for her children to socialize with others. A few months in, that began to change as Nagel started to worry about her children missing out. There were opportunities in the community, particularly at the local church. However, as her children's old friends from public school moved on, leaving the Nagels “out of the circle,” they began to look for new circles.

What they have found in the four years since is a variety of opportunities and activities that leave Nagel confident that her children aren't missing out on anything. Some of those opportunities, such as 4-H, Awana and Boy Scouts, have come from outside the home-schooling community. However, working through Ocean Grove, the Nagel twins have had their educational experience move far beyond the walls of their home. There are the regular group meetings, which include activities such as drawing and exercising. There are small-scale outings to local parks and more ambi-

tious adventures, such as visits to the beach, the Monterey Bay Aquarium or San Francisco.

The trips combine socialization with education. For instance, a trip to the aquarium can involve writing journals or putting together a photo collection. Nagel admits, though, that “it’s now like the tenth time we’ve been there, so a lot of it is just hanging out with their friends.”

Social media allows the home-schooling group to connect and coordinate with nearly 300 members around Santa Cruz County. “What we’re doing now is working on a drama production,” Nagel says. “My children are also involved as counselors, working with younger children, which is a really valuable experience.”

The early apprehensions are gone. The original reasons for choosing home schooling — the opportunity to manage the children's time and curriculum instead of having it set for them — have proven successful. The group activities have added another dimension.

“[Ocean Grove] is trying to make the whole individual learning approach very user-friendly,” Nagel says. “It has been a huge blessing the way it has evolved to what it is now.”

To see how Ocean Grove Charter School can provide your children with a well-rounded education, visit www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.



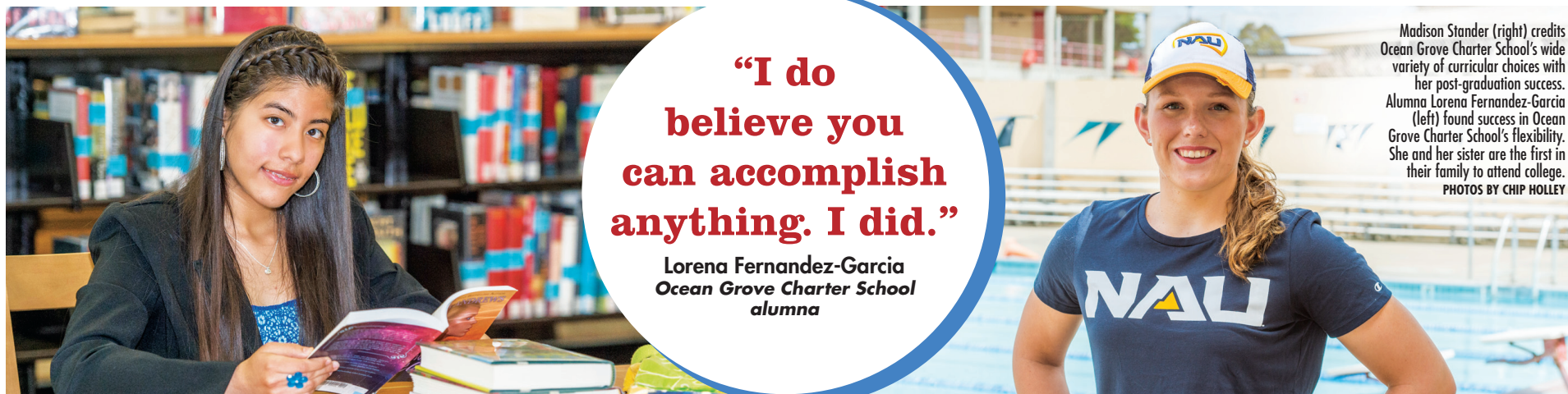
GET HANDS-ON WITH GROUP EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Whether a student's passion lies in nocturnal cave-dwelling bats or the kind that come from Louisville, Ocean Grove Charter school offers group educational activities that cater to their interests. Students may find themselves in the bat caves of Pinnacles National Park or the dugout at San Francisco's AT&T Park for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Giants' stadium.

Julia Keller, education liaison for Ocean Grove Charter School, says she tries to find programs that appeal to different age groups and interests. Disneyland, for instance, offers separate educational presentations for younger children and those in high school. Students can also join group educational activities to Yosemite, Winchester Mystery

House, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Tech Museum of Innovation and NASA's Ames Research Center at Moffett Field.

In addition to field trips, Ocean Grove offers other group activities, such as the spelling and geography bees, where top finishers qualify to compete at higher levels.



**“I do
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Lorena Fernandez-Garcia
Ocean Grove Charter School
alumna

Madison Stander (right) credits Ocean Grove Charter School's wide variety of curricular choices with her post-graduation success. Alumna Lorena Fernandez-Garcia (left) found success in Ocean Grove Charter School's flexibility. She and her sister are the first in their family to attend college.

PHOTOS BY CHIP HOLLEY



A PATH TO COLLEGE

Ocean Grove Charter School can help students fulfill A-G college requirements in a variety of ways. Options include working out of a textbook, attending classes through a vendor, taking college courses, or completing online classes.

“Starting in eighth grade, we work with students, parents and educational specialists on making high school course choices,” says Kim Evans, assistant director of guidance at Ocean Grove. “Closer to graduation, we help with post-high-school decisions.”

According to Evans, home-schoolers’ diverse transcripts and extracurricular activities are appealing to colleges. Such diversity is made possible by the myriad curriculum choices available to them through schools such as Ocean Grove.

“Students at traditional schools work so hard and accomplish so much [academically] — but how do they distinguish themselves? Our students have time to explore, volunteer, start their own businesses. ... [They] just look like someone interesting to have on your campus.”

Forging a Path to Success

Students find their own way to make the most of their education

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Ocean Grove Charter School has many success stories, each is as unique and individual as the students they serve.

Eighteen-year-old Lorena Fernandez-Garcia went to public schools until 10th grade. She found her high school uninspiring and attending overcrowded classes an increasingly tedious chore. When she found Ocean Grove, its flexible curriculum and coursework were an instant fit. “I loved how I was able to set my own schedule,” she says. “You’re not told ‘You have to take these courses.’ They let you choose whatever you want.”

Lorena completed all the college preparatory A-G requirements, but in less time than she would have spent every day in a brick-and-mortar classroom. She became a member of the National Honor Society and graduated in the spring of 2016 with a Biliteracy Seal. She and her sister are the first in their family to attend college. “I do believe you can accomplish anything,” she says. “I did.”

Madison Stander, also 18, is another 2016 Ocean Grove graduate. A competitive swimmer, she started home-schooling in second grade to devote more time to her passion, which she began at the age of 7. “I was also able to learn in my style of

learning,” she says. “I have to hear it, write it down, go over it again and again.”

By high school, she was taking A-G requirements, but like Lorena, she relished the variety, both in terms of course content and lesson delivery. “I took group classes, took courses at the junior college, took classes online,” she says. The online courses allowed her to have a very flexible schedule. She used the extra time to volunteer at the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, where she was promoted to a supervisory position and given the opportunity to do a monthlong medical internship in India. “None of that would have been doable if I’d been at a traditional high school,” she says. “I would only have had time for swim team and AP homework.”

Instead, Madison says she enjoyed the process and is now poised to attend Northern Arizona University, where she received a full scholarship in part, she feels, because of her diverse experiences. She plans to pursue a bio-medical degree and go on to medical school. “My educational specialist and my mother made it all possible,” she says. “It’s perfect.”

To see how Ocean Grove Charter School can help your high-schooler get or stay on track, visit www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.

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Madison Stander
Ocean Grove Charter School
alumna

A Path for Every Child

Flexible curriculum allows students to learn at their best

BY JENNIFER BONNETT

Holly Gallo knew long before she had children that she wanted to home-school them. In 1992, as a student teacher in the public school system, she found that the one-size-fits-all model in the traditional classroom didn't work. She wanted to be able to focus on a child's learning type and interests through personalization. So when her eldest started kindergarten 14 years ago, that's exactly what she did when she enrolled him in Ocean Grove Charter School.

The home-based personalized learning charter school gives parents permission to do things differently when it comes to education, depending on what works best for each child. The goal is, with the help of an educational specialist, to find an individualized path for each child through a flexible curriculum.

According to Gallo, who is herself a credentialed teacher and educational specialist with Ocean Grove, they can do this by choosing a core curriculum such as Saxon Math, the Critical Thinking Co. or the Art of Problem Solving, and supplementing it through online applications, including flashcard apps, printed worksheets, textbooks, DVDs, even home-schooler classrooms. It's all dependent on how the student learns best and what the parents feel most comfortable teaching.

"It can look different even in the same family," Gallo says. "Because I am working with parents that are highly motivated

"[Parents] are right there with me trying to figure out what's going to be a good fit for each child."

Holly Gallo
Educational Specialist

to teach their children, they're right there with me trying to figure out what's going to be a good fit for each child."

Gallo works as an ES with 14 different Ocean Grove families. It is her job to help them choose the best curriculum for each of the 25 students she works with year after year. Her own two children, for example, have opposite learning styles. While her son is an auditory learner, her daughter enjoys a more formal presentation of information, so Gallo relies heavily on textbooks. Still other families do almost all of their studies using online tools. These may include education apps downloaded to a computer or live lessons taught by teachers like Gallo, or both.

"Hearing it a different way from a different source might make it easier for them to learn," she said. "But it's pretty common to have different ways of learning in home schooling."

To see how Ocean Grove Charter School can accommodate your learner, visit www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.

Educational specialist Holly Gallo works with her own children – as well as 14 other home-schooling families – to find what type of curriculum and resources best suit each student's learning style.
PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



HOW INSTRUCTIONAL FUNDS WORK

Like traditional schools, charter schools are state-funded based on student average daily attendance. IEM schools strive to provide as much instructional funds to families as possible. Currently this is over \$2,000 per student per school year, with higher funding available for high school students. At Ocean Grove Charter School, parents get to choose how instructional funds are spent, selecting from a wide variety of learning materials, programs and classes through thousands of approved vendors. Textbooks, dance classes, French lessons or chemistry labs – families are given the freedom to tailor their child's education with options that may not be available in a more traditional school. Educational specialists and parents determine together what best suits students' needs and learning styles.

"It's so customized, I've seen so many different ways that parents, students and teachers have used instructional funds. It's really customized to help them succeed," says Shawna Bohn, assistant director of teacher support services. "We really take a look at our spending and we try to give as much as we can to the kids and their learning curriculum."



“We have the luxury of designing an entire curriculum plan around students’ interests to make it ... meaningful for them.”

Sara Kishlansky
Ocean Grove Charter School’s 2015-16
Educational Specialist of the Year

Supporting Families in **Success**

BY JENNIFER BONNETT

Q&A with Sara Kishlansky, Educational Specialist of the Year

Sara Kishlansky, Ocean Grove Charter School’s 2015-16 Educational Specialist of the Year, has worked one on one with special-needs children, at summer kayaking and paddle boarding camps for kids, and as a substitute elementary school teacher. She stumbled upon IEM by chance more than six years ago and has been with them since.

? **How do you feel about being named Educational Specialist of the Year?**

It is a great honor. I was completely taken by surprise. I have so many wonderful co-workers who are incredible at their jobs and who have helped me, and continue to help me, become better at what I do. It could have been any one of them as well.

I certainly feel humbled about it. It has given me reason to reflect on what I do well, my purpose and how I can do better. And, of course, it was validating and good to know that I’m on the right track.

? **What is your job exactly?**

As educational specialists, we work with students and families to realize the educational goals of each individual student.

We are in a unique position in that we can offer support and guidance to parents who are home-schooling and be a resource for them. We can help them find curriculum and classes to help their student grow, offer advice and ideas and provide things like assessments so that we can better track progress.

? **How does the practice of working with the same students year after year benefit them?**

You get to really see the students grow and change; you help them discover interests and then get to see them turn those interests into passions. Working with them over years allows students and ESs to put in place and realize long-term goals.

When the school year ends, we don’t say goodbye and send them on to their next teacher. We look at our progress over the current year and work on ways to improve it for the following year and ways we can weave in more things that are meaningful to their educational goals.

? **How is this different than a brick-and-mortar classroom?**

I feel like working in our type of school model differs from a traditional setting because we can strip away that

one-size-fits-all mentality that is a necessity in many brick-and-mortar schools. We can meet the student where they are academically, even if that is below or above their grade level.

We can cater curriculum and classes specifically to target holes that they may have in their learning or in areas where they are advanced. We have the luxury of designing an entire curriculum plan around students’ interests to make it ... meaningful for them.

? **Do you have any examples of students who have flourished under this program after struggling in a traditional classroom?**

I have seen so many students make progress. One that I can think of in particular joined Ocean Grove in eighth grade after being bullied at his middle school.

We began working together, and he was able to find a niche where he could make progress, create friendships and where he could discover his interests without worry. He discovered a love of photography and became proficient in computer science. He graduated last year and is now successfully attending college, working and traveling.

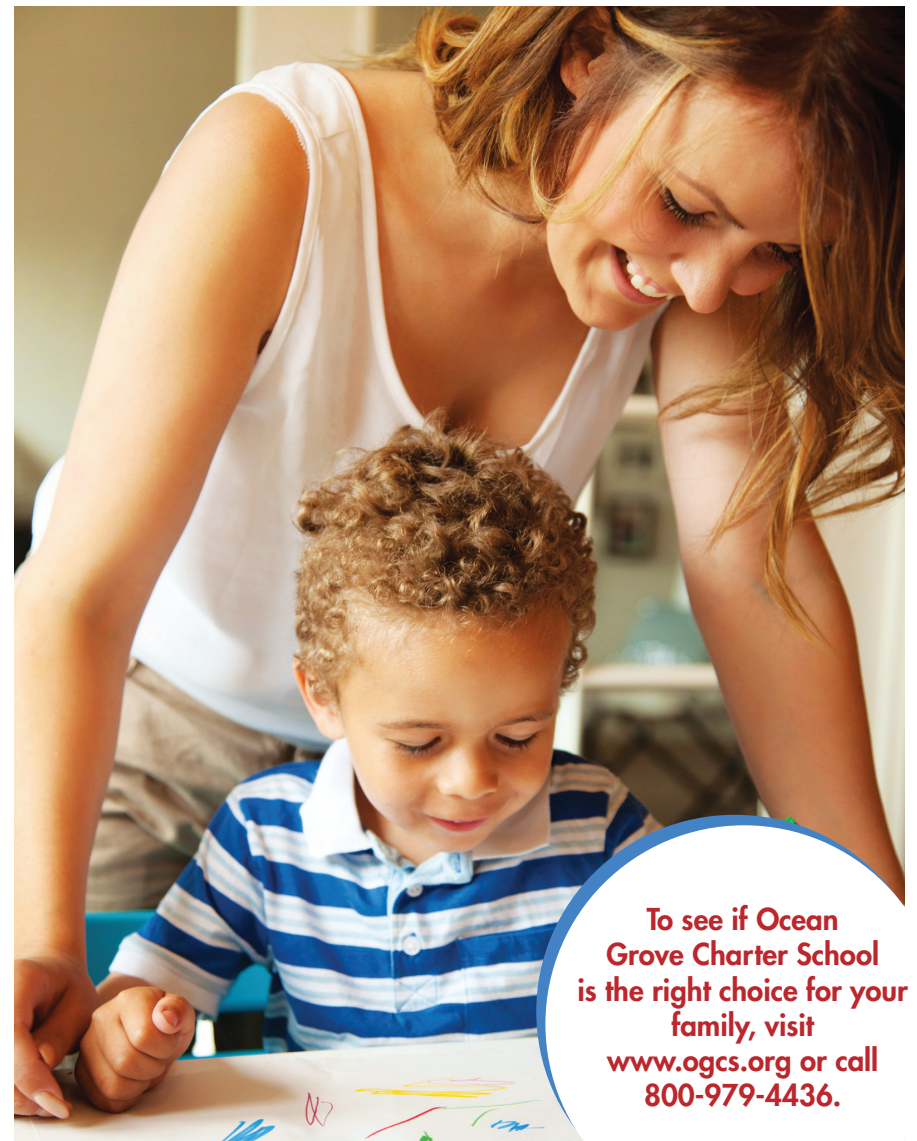
Giving Families the Power of Choice

Ocean Grove Charter School is where parents choose and students succeed. For nearly 20 years, they have been supporting parents with the resources they need to give their children an education that best suits their strengths and interests, while at the same time giving students the freedom to follow their passions.

Over 4,000 vendors provide ample choices for parents to find the best fit for their student's learning style and interests, from traditional book-based curriculum to hands-on labs that bring

lessons to life. And as a public school, enrollment is free to any student who lives in Santa Cruz or its adjacent counties.

"Our purpose is to offer a personalized learning model of instruction to anyone whose family decides this is how they want to educate their child," says Cynthia Rachel, director of education support services. "We really are able to say, 'Here are all of your options, let's see what works best for your child.' I think that's really powerful for parents."



To see if Ocean Grove Charter School is the right choice for your family, visit www.ogcs.org or call 800-979-4436.

LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

Innovative Education Management has charter schools across the state to help families create enriching learning environments for their students.



Innovative Education Management

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Placerville, CA 95667
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www.ieminc.org



Sky Mountain Charter School

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www.sscs.cc
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