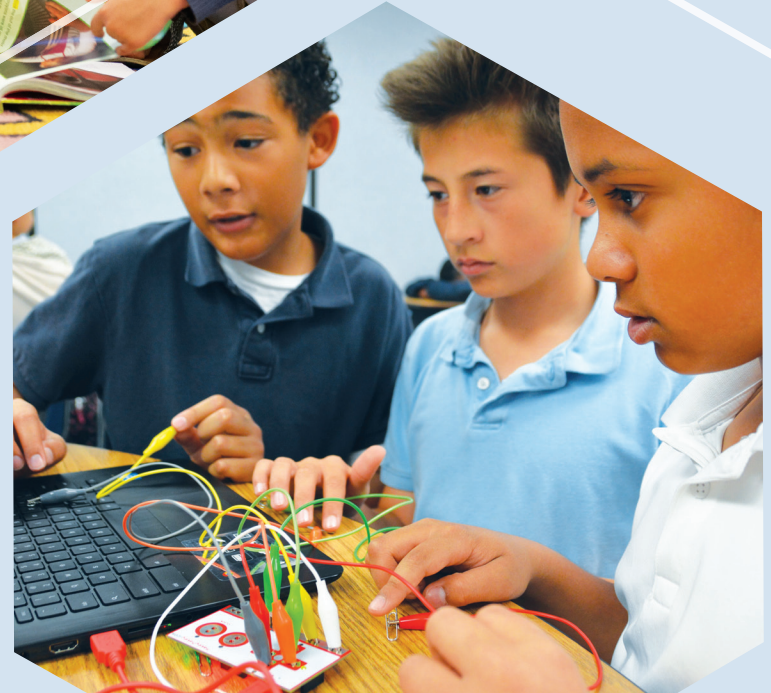




Westlake
CHARTER SCHOOL



Ready, Set, Explore!

**Find out how Westlake Charter School is charting
a new course for public education.**

COURTESY PHOTO
BY LISA SMILEY

Getting to Know Westlake

A school built for Explorers

BY KATE GONZALES



WESTLAKE'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

From its very beginnings, Westlake Charter School has been the little school that could.

In the early 2000s, the Natomas Unified School District planned to build an elementary school in Natomas' Westlake community — a prospect that attracted families to the neighborhood. When the district decided not to move forward with construction, a group of invested parents decided to open a new kind of school.

"The origins of the school are definitely parent-driven," says Robynne Rose, founding president of the Westlake Charter School Board of Directors. Rose was a high school language arts teacher with two young children at the time. With no idea where they would hold classes, she and a team made up largely of parents with educational expertise set up shop in her living room and began to write a charter — a foundational document for all charter schools.

"We had so many educators that were involved in this, that it really added an amazing dimension to developing the charter," Rose remembers.

The team developed the philosophy for an innovative new school — one that saw children as Explorers, each with an important role in the world. The hard work of the founders is still honored in the school's current mission: "We demonstrate what is possible when school and community collaborate to create

inspiring adults with the academic and social-emotional readiness to lead as Global Citizens."

"We wanted our students to leave Westlake Charter encouraged to change the world for the better," Rose says.

The very first group of Westlake teachers put this framework into practice.

Christina Eick, a founding teacher, was drawn to the school because she could develop personalized curriculum with fellow educators.

"We dreamed up what it was going to look like," says Eick. "It was a really unique and exciting opportunity."

Westlake Charter School opened its doors to children in kindergarten through second grade in 2005. The school grew each year, eventually adding students up through eighth grade. With no campus of its own, students shared space at a few different schools over the years. Today, the elementary and middle schools operate on two separate sites they share with other Natomas schools. Westlake's culture, however, has never been stronger, and an exciting new development is on the horizon.

In November 2014, Natomas voters approved a school facilities bond that funded construction of a brand new school in North Natomas for the entire Westlake family.

"I'm very excited to see everybody under one roof," says Rose.

**"We wanted our
students to leave
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Robynne Rose
*Founding president of Westlake Charter School
Board of Directors*

The vision of Westlake Charter School is not to simply teach, but to connect Explorers to the world. Every day, students gain the tools to learn, grow and become people who make positive impacts on the world around them.

The school's mission is: "*We demonstrate what is possible when school and community collaborate to create inspiring adults with the academic and social-emotional readiness to lead as Global Citizens.*"

The school's founders developed a unique educational philosophy guided by four **Educational Pillars**:

**Our Place in a
Global World**

**Teachers as
Designers**

**Expanding Educational
Opportunities**

Personalization

A Place for Parents

Westlake welcomes family involvement

BY KATE GONZALES

Last year, Westlake parents put in more than 20,000 volunteer hours, doing everything from helping in classrooms to planning events to pressure washing the school's walls. Parent involvement means Westlake teachers are able to do more with the resources they have.

Anthony Najera doesn't always get the chance to tuck his 8-year-old daughter, Isabella, into bed at night. As an airline flight attendant, he sometimes has to spend nights away from home. So when he gets to surprise his daughter at school as a volunteer Mystery Reader, it's very special.

"When I show up to her classroom, it's really a treat for her," Najera says. "She gets so excited and wants to sit in my lap while I'm reading the story."

Isabella, a third-grader, has attended Westlake since she was in kindergarten. The opportunities to be active at her school have delighted Najera and his wife, Karyn.

"My relationship with the school, it's a great one," he says. "It's such a good feeling."

He is willing to take on most projects, including constructing classroom furniture at the beginning of the year and serving on the parking lot committee. His commitment to his daughter's school is not unique. Parents are encouraged to volunteer and with Westlake offering countless ways to become part of the school's culture, many parents go above and beyond.

The Westlake Association of Volunteer Explorers, or WAVE, allows parents to take an active role in the school depending on their individual interests, talents and availability. They can help with fundraising and organizing volunteers for major events like the International Festival, Parents Go to School Night, The Westlake Olympic Triathlon, or the annual Chili Cook Off, to name just a few. The fundraisers allow teachers to try innovative practices, like using 3-D printers, exploring science in the field and hands-on Project-Based Learning. When parents volunteer on campus, their student sees that education is important, which has a positive impact on Westlake as a whole.

While most schools do parent-teacher conferences, Westlake hosts student-led conferences. Under Westlake's innovative model, students take a lead in organizing, reflecting on progress and communicating with their teacher and parents about their skills and progress. Students take weeks to prepare — choosing work they'd like to show their parents, identifying their own areas of improvement and rehearsing.

The student-led conferences allow these children to practice the "four Cs" of 21st-century learning — Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking.

Najera says the strong parent involvement at Westlake feels good, but it also helps his daughter academically. When he can see how the teacher conducts a lesson in the classroom, he and his wife can mirror those practices at home. Staff keep an open line of communication with the parents.

"It's a really good open-door policy," Najera says. "I know she's getting a good education."

Anthony Najera and his daughter, Isabella, read together at Westlake Charter School. Najera says parent involvement is one thing he loves about the school.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

"It's a really good open-door policy. I know she's getting a good education."

Anthony Najera
Westlake Charter School parent

WESTLAKE'S

CORE VALUES

Each month, students focus on one of the school's
10 Core Values:

Respect
Excellence
Responsibility
Reflective
Global Perspective

Stewardship
Perseverance
Inquisitive
Joyful Learning
Gratitude

Students are encouraged to demonstrate each Core Value academically, personally, within the community and as digital citizens, and each student is recognized when they do.

Discover the ways Westlake students put Core Values into practice! See all our Core Value videos and promotions at www.wcscorevalues.com.



Westlake Charter School teachers Amber Sutton, left, and Danielle Rojo work to accommodate their students' broad spectrum of abilities and learning styles through designing personalized instruction. PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

What Students Need

Teachers as Designers

BY ANNE STOKES

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

For many districts and schools, enrichment courses are expendable. At Westlake Charter School, they're indispensable.

Westlake's Pillar of Expanding Educational Opportunities is founded on the belief that enriching opportunities for kids help them stay engaged.

Westlake charts a path for every student in kindergarten through eighth grade to take Art, Spanish and Physical Education classes, which helps them become well-rounded learners.

"Being exposed to the different specialties we have, students are given a global perspective," says Spanish teacher Abigail Grimaldi. This enrichment makes students more

inquisitive and really demonstrates the Core Value of Joyful Learning.

Specialty classes are integrated with core subjects through Westlake's Project-Based Learning approach. For example, science or math concepts can be taught in conjunction with physical education through hands-on activities that cover the same lessons.

Grimaldi says that along with the foundation of core classes Westlake offers, all students take specialty classes — which broaden their skills and ignite the Explorer inside of them.

Danielle Rojo's third grade students have a broad spectrum of abilities and learning styles. Some of her students can handle advanced math, while some are challenged by addition and subtraction. It's up to her to find what works for each of them.

For one of her students, it's coding that gets him motivated.

"He's a math wiz if he *wants* to do it," she says. "If I can pull him in with coding, he can do it."

This freedom to design lessons that adapt to her students' needs is one of the ways Westlake is able to help students achieve.

Designing for each student's needs

In designing for her students' individual needs, Rojo has the freedom to implement a variety of techniques.

In her class, Rojo often designs for her students' ability levels through small group instruction. Groups are determined by continual assessments and students are encouraged to develop their own goals and chart strategies to meet them.

Because she's not tied to a specific curriculum or timeline, she's able to customize lessons around what students need, rather than a one-size-fits-all curriculum. This demonstrates one of the guiding pillars at Westlake: Teachers as Designers.

"Tailoring instruction for each student makes them excited. It fits students' needs

and doesn't bore them, it doesn't make them feel lost," she says. "There really is no average student, there are 22 different students who need different things. We don't teach to the average, we teach to each child."

Successful design through collaboration

According to science teacher Amber Sutton, Westlake teachers are bolstered by an atmosphere of collaboration. At Westlake, teachers are encouraged to seek out new methods and resources and share their successful

strategies. When Project-Based Learning got the attention of staff several years ago as a way to engage middle school students, they agreed that it was a direction to explore. Teachers traveled to different schools to learn more about the approach, in which students learn by doing.

"Fast forward a few years and our school is now a California Gold Ribbon School for our Project-Based Learning," Sutton says. Innovative ideas, such as Project-Based

Learning, result from the freedom teachers are given to seek out innovative methods and resources and share them with peers.

As designers, teachers ask themselves questions such as, "How does this class need to grow? What do I need to do as their educator to get them where they need to be?" Sutton says. This allows teachers to create an environment where all students can flourish.

"We don't teach to the average, we teach to each child."

Danielle Rojo
Westlake Charter School teacher

Finding the Right Fit

Collaboration makes a difference

BY ANNE STOKES

When it came time to find the right school for her children, Monica Isaac was uniquely qualified.

As a substitute teacher, Isaac had been in classrooms all over her local district. When she found Westlake Charter School, she knew it was the best place for her own student.

"I liked the small class size, I liked the flexibility in curriculum, I liked the campus community and the culture of Westlake," Isaac says. "The fact that parents are encouraged to be involved is a big deal."

It wasn't until her son Simon was diagnosed with dyslexia in the fourth grade that she realized just how good a fit the school really was. At Westlake, Isaac was able to work with teachers to get Simon the extra help that he needed — individualized help that some traditional schools might struggle to give within larger

class sizes. Simon also benefited from Westlake's Project-Based Learning approach, which allowed him to learn hands-on and be assessed through various methods, not just written tests.

"There's always a creative component to demonstrating understanding of things that are learned in class, which is really important," says Isaac. "They're not just regurgitating information. They are really having to apply it and put it into something, even if it's a picture or some sort of storyboard or diagram."

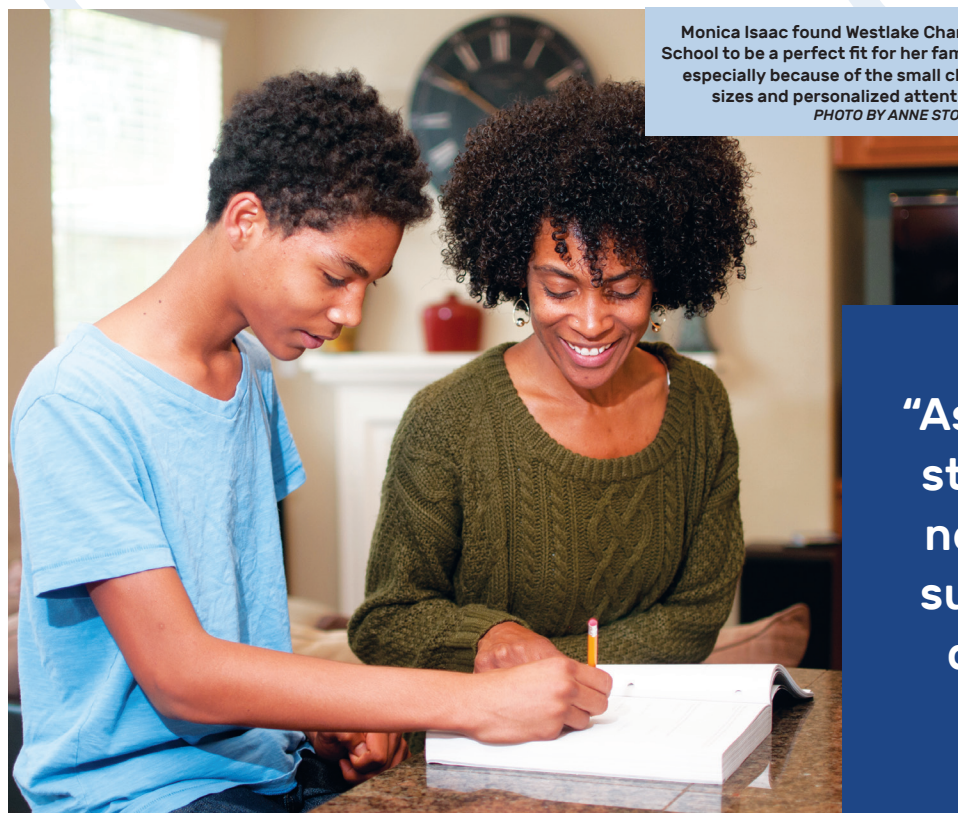
Now a freshman at Natomas High School, Simon is taking Advanced Placement and honors classes. He says teachers at Westlake gave him a great educational foundation because they accommodated his learning style.

"They gave me extra time on a lot of assignments," he says. "For English, when we read books, they would always try to find the audio, because if I just read it on the page, I can't comprehend it as well as when I hear it ... It felt better to do that, to have more support, so I would always know what's going on."

Isaac agrees that it was the personalization that her son got at Westlake that helped prepare him for high school success.

"He's intelligent, but if you don't have that foundation of knowledge, then it's going to be difficult for you to take that next step and take those more difficult classes," Isaac says. "I think foundationally, as far as giving their students what they need to be ready to succeed in whatever high school environment they choose, Westlake does a great job."

Monica Isaac found Westlake Charter School to be a perfect fit for her family, especially because of the small class sizes and personalized attention.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



"As far as giving their students what they need to be ready to succeed ... Westlake does a great job."

Monica Isaac
Westlake Charter School parent

PERSONALIZATION

Personalization at Westlake is all about meeting students' needs, and the school intentionally creates an inclusive culture to ensure that students are served in a general education classroom.

A study from the University of British Columbia found that students served by special education who learn alongside

general education peers academically outperform those in less inclusive environments. All students get what they need at Westlake — thanks to the Pillar of Personalization.

"We're supporting students to be ready for the real world, to be in an environment from the moment they begin school that prepares

them for real life," says kindergarten teacher Ashlee Patel. "For students with special needs, that supports them socially, emotionally and academically."

Inclusive classroom settings also benefit general education students, not just those with special needs.

"When students are around a multitude of students of differing

abilities ... they learn social skills at a much deeper level," Patel says. "Inclusion teaches the value of differences and helps kids see that we all need something different, that we all can benefit from learning from each other and that difference is valued."

Academic & Social-Emotional Readiness

Westlake Charter teaches to
the whole child

BY KATE GONZALES

Humanities teacher Vasa Lokteff (left)
has seen how the balanced approach of
academic and social-emotional readiness
help students at Westlake thrive.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



**“I want this
to be a place
where students feel
successful.”**

Danielle Christy
*Westlake Charter
School Psychologist*

In any school, students can expect to learn math, science or language arts in their classroom. Students at Westlake Charter School, however, get something more: an education that builds social-emotional readiness.

Westlake Charter School was founded on the belief that kids learn and grow best when instruction focuses on both academic and social-emotional readiness. That is why Joyful Learning is a Core Value.

“The social-emotional learning curriculum is as important as academic learning,” says Danielle Christy, one of two School Psychologists. “Some kids need social-emotional skills taught explicitly, just like reading.”

Elementary students engage in a daily class meeting that builds culture, while the middle school students each take an advisory class where they form a sense of community outside of the academic setting. Through discussion and activities, students take responsibility for their own academics and social-emotional progress with direct, one-on-one help from their teacher and the classroom community. Through this model, those who face academic and social-emotional challenges spend time identifying areas of growth and developing a plan to improve. If a

student needs further emotional support and counseling, they also have somewhere to turn.

Christy holds group counseling sessions known as Lunch Bunch, a safe space for groups of students to have lunch together and talk about life’s challenges. Students practice problem-solving, positive self-talk, develop mindfulness, self-regulation and social skills. When children show progress, Christy rewards them with prizes and praise.

“I want this to be a place where students feel successful,” she says.

Westlake also develops student character by focusing on its 10 Core Values. Each month, the whole school focuses on one of these values. For example, during December the school focuses on Gratitude. Students make videos, participate in classroom activities and engage in discussions to develop an understanding of the Core Value.

Promoting a healthy social-emotional life can be key to positive academic and behavioral growth.

“Research shows that when you intervene early, all of the outcomes are better,” Christy says.

Eighth-grade humanities teacher Vasa Lokteff has seen the proof. He says the kind of support students get at

Westlake gives them the tools they need to grow.

He recalls a student who had a hard time handling their emotions and would act out. The school provided counseling and the community of Lunch Bunch, and with a support plan in place, the student has shown incredible growth. In fact, the academic gains that this student has achieved is an example of how Westlake’s approach can lead to success.

“Students are going to learn by experience and ... through being reflective on their behavior,” he says. “We have a lot of success stories.”

OUR PLACE IN A GLOBAL WORLD

Westlake Charter School fosters an environment rich with diversity and cultural understanding, where students learn to lead as global citizens.

International focus

Students in every grade study a particular continent in depth. Teachers design lessons around that continent, giving students a wider understanding of the world around them.

Spanish courses

Studies show that language is easier to learn as a child. As part of Westlake’s commitment to shaping students’ global perspective, all students in kindergarten through eighth grade at Westlake receive Spanish instruction.

Olympic Triathlon

Each fall, students gather for this academic competition. Each class creates a flag representing a country in the continent they are studying and the Olympic theme song sets the tone for a day that includes parents, students and staff.

International Festival

Every April, Westlake showcases its diversity in a community event where parents set up booths with food samplings, artifacts and information about their culture. Students collect passport stamps as they learn about cultures around the world.

Global Technology

Westlake Explorers use technology to travel the world. Students connect with classrooms across the globe, using technology to video chat with other classrooms around the world. They also take virtual field trips to places like Cambodia to learn about the Komodo dragon.

9 Things You Need to Know About Westlake

BY MICHELLE CARL



1 Charter schools 101

Charter schools are free, public schools of choice, open to all families who seek quality education. They reflect the diversity of communities and welcome students from all neighborhoods. Charter schools allow for more freedom for educators and parents to design curriculum and make educational decisions.

2 Students are called Explorers

Westlake calls its students Explorers because they approach learning by first exploring.

"We're not about rote memorization — we really believe in exploratory, thematic, hands-on and Project-Based Learning," says John Eick, Executive Director of Westlake Charter School.

3 Westlake has a lot to be thankful for

Not only is gratitude one of the school's Core Values, it's something Westlake felt as it began construction of its new K-8 campus at Maybrook and Mabry drives in Sacramento.

"We are very grateful to the voters of our region who helped to pass the local bond Measure J," John Eick says of the bond that allotted resources for Westlake to have its own school site.

4 A 21st century school

The new 84,000-square-foot Explorer Campus was designed to emphasize the four Cs of 21st century learning: Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking. Grade levels are organized into "neighborhoods," Eick says. Each neighborhood has flexible learning spaces that allow more room for thematic group projects (like building a roller coaster to study velocity), cozy nooks for small-group learning, and roll-up glass doors that lead into outdoor quad learning areas (great for painting or staging a play).

5 Small class sizes

Westlake Charter school is committed to small class sizes. "We have found that by keeping class sizes small, it allows our teachers to personalize for all students and ensure that every Explorer gets what they need," says Eick.

6 Students wear official Westlake gear!

Students wear uniforms to school — which makes back-to-school shopping a breeze — but there is a greater purpose.

"When every kid comes to campus wearing the same thing, you focus on education and not who's wearing what brand and what color," says Hope Gawlick, Westlake Charter School Board President.

7 Westlake is a FREE public school!

Westlake is open to EVERYBODY!

"There's no entrance exam, no prequalification requirements — each child that comes to Westlake is welcomed and wanted," Gawlick says.

Since Westlake is a public school that uses public funds, it abides by California Education Code. That means that it has a Board of Directors to govern the school and is open to everyone who applies.

8 Parents are a part of the success!

Parents are welcomed at Westlake because parental involvement correlates directly to student achievement. Parents are one point in a triangle that includes the student and his or her teacher, "and if those three pieces are working together, you're going to see success," Gawlick says.

9 The community is welcome on campus

Whether it's the International Festival or the annual Fall Festival, parents, teachers and community members are invited and encouraged to be a part of Westlake!

Calling All Explorers!

Westlake's next adventure will be its best yet

Now that you know about the unique education Westlake Charter School provides in our community, you understand why the parents, teachers and students that make up the Westlake family are so excited to be working together.

Westlake Charter School's new Explorer Campus is a 21st century learning facility, designed upon Westlake's Four Educational Pillars:

- **Our Place in a Global World**
- **Teachers as Designers**
- **Expanding Education Opportunities**
- **Personalization**

At this exciting time, Executive Director John Eick realizes Westlake would not be where it is today without the community. Westlake Charter School's new Explorer Campus will house its kindergarten through eighth-grade programs on one campus. The new campus was designed through school and community collaboration. Input on learning spaces was taken from the teachers, students, parents and the community.

"We've been able to do amazing work at the current school sites we have because of our dedicated parents and teachers. But now we will have a campus that truly reflects our values and our Explorer theme," Eick says. "This wouldn't have been possible without the Natomas Unified School District, the NUSD Board of Directors and, most importantly, the community that supported Measure J. We want to say a huge Explorer 'thank you' to our entire community!"



Westlake
CHARTER SCHOOL

Connecting Explorers
to the World

Campus address

2680 Mabry Drive
Sacramento, CA 95835
(916) 567-5760

www.westlakecharter.com

Westlake is a community steward

The school plans to reduce the impact of traffic in the neighborhood and create an environment that encourages students to walk or bike to campus. Westlake aims to be the best walking and biking school in the region! For more information, visit waystowestlake.com.

How to become an Explorer

Applications are accepted from December through January each year and waitlist applications are accepted year-round. Find out more about enrollment at joinwestlake.com.