

Before- and after-school programs enrich learning at California district

Champions supports curriculum and promotes 21st century skills in safe, engaging environment at Union School District

When Superintendent Jacqueline M. Horejs arrived at Union School District in San Jose, Calif. in 2006, district enrollment was on a downward spiral. Soon, however, the numbers started climbing. Along with 1,000 new students came a demand for quality before- and after-school childcare for the growing K8 district.

Horejs had to look no further than her district's own Guadalupe Elementary School, which had been using Champions' before- and after-school programs since 1997. The school's students, parents and teachers were so pleased with Champions that a quadruple-wide modular building was needed to house the program—known for

its colorful, fun and educational spaces that help students develop academically, physically and socially.

Today, Champions operates before- and after-school programs at three district elementary schools and after-care at a middle school. In all, about 300 students attend Champions programs in the 5,500-student district.

"When you walk into one of our Champions facilities, you see a positive, interactive learning environment that's bright, clean and safe," Horejs says. "The focus on safety and the positive relationship with our teaching staff and families really set Champions apart from other providers."

Champions staff members meet with district teachers to better understand the academic needs of individual students as well as classroom goals. For example, if a kindergarten class is learning about the letter B, the after-school staff will serve B-themed snacks or lead B-themed activities. "The staff understands that they are an extension of our school program," Horejs says.

Parents pay fees directly to Champions, which offers scholarships and a sliding scale. The Champions staff participates in school events such as walkathons, and also helps promote school activities.

"They've always been supportive partners," Horejs says. "They don't see themselves as outsiders, and neither do we."

Students can do homework at Champions; participate in physical activities that promote fitness, teamwork and fun; or work on child-initiated or teacher-led projects or activities that promote



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the "4 C's" of 21st century learning, as well as the "4 P's" of creativity.

"Students learn to interact with children of other ages and grades in a variety of games and activities that support communication and collaboration," Horejs says. "If two of our students want to use the same device, for example, they learn about conflict resolution in a social setting."

During creative activities, students understand the process and product while working together in an engaging, supportive environment, she says. Horejs remembers watching children construct a LEGO machine they had envisioned in a story they made up. "These are nice opportunities for children to put their creativity to work and cre-

ate a deliverable product as a result," she says.

Champions facilities feature colorful walls, interesting configurations and inviting furniture. Students have the option of five activity areas, which include problem-solving and literacy skills; art, drama and music; science; individual and team sports; and self-serve snacks that promote children's understanding of healthy nutrition.

"I don't think you can measure it quantitatively, but we get no calls from unhappy parents," Horejs says. "We have waiting lists for every Champions facility, and principals are eager to expand the programs."

"The knowledge that we have a high-quality after-school program has kept our population growing," Horejs says. "People want to be here because they're confident they're going to have a high-quality program, not only during the school day but also after the bell rings."

To learn more about Champions, please visit www.discoverchampions.com.

