



ARISE HIGH SCHOOL

Authenticity • Rigor • Inspiration • Success • Empowerment

9/26/24

Dear OUSD Board of Directors,

On behalf of ARISE High School, I want to extend our heartfelt thanks for welcoming us to the Initial Public Hearing for our charter renewal on Monday. We truly appreciate your thoughtful attention as our community presented, and those who shared during public comment were grateful for your engagement and attentiveness as they spoke vulnerably about their experiences. Please find attached the answers to your questions from Monday.

We understand that this process can be taxing for everyone involved, but we have found it to be an invigorating opportunity to re-center on our mission and vision, celebrate all the hard work that has brought us here, and reflect on the ongoing work to improve. It has been an energizing moment for our school community, and we are looking forward to returning on October 23rd.

If possible, we would greatly appreciate being placed first on the agenda for the October 23rd meeting, as bringing our community out late into the night can be challenging. We completely understand if it's not feasible but would be grateful if it could be considered.

We are deeply appreciative of your public service in these roles, and we are especially grateful that each of you has taken the time to visit ARISE. Below are the answers to your questions from the hearing. Please let us know if there are additional data points you would like us to highlight in our October presentation so that we can gather them in advance.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Karla Gandiaga (she/ella)

Directora - Head of School

ARISE High School - Initial Public Hearing Questions and Answers

1. How many employee complaints of discrimination and/or sexual harassment has the school had over the past 5 years, by year?

Over the past five years, we have had one employee complaint of discrimination and/or sexual harassment. This occurred in the 2022-2023 school year and was fully investigated by an outside HR consultant. Following the investigation, appropriate action was taken and documented.

2. How many formal Level I complaints have families made to ARISE over the past 5 years, by year?

None.

3. How many complaints regarding the school has OUSD's charter office received (from employees or families) over the past 5 years, by year?

This appears to be an item that should be provided by the Office of Charter Schools, because we cannot be certain that we have been informed of all complaints.

4. Of the 69 students with IEPs, what percentage has extensive disabilities? How do you define and measure extensive disabilities for this purpose?

We have 72 students with IEPs as of 9-25-24. Of those students two of them have IEPs with extensive needs disabilities. We use the CTC definition/guidelines to determine which students have extensive needs per their IEP.

5. "Do you offer a comprehensive continuum of programs and services for students with IEPs? For comparison, some of the services that OUSD provides are: Resource teacher, Inclusion specialist, Paraprofessional, IA, SLP, OT, PT, Assistive Tech, LVN, Registered Behavioral Technician, and Transportation. Which of these services does your school provide and/or are there others? What plan do you have to offer those services if any of your students in the future need them? If you do not offer those services, why do you think families that require those services do not choose to enroll at your school?"

We currently provide a comprehensive range of services for students with IEPs, including 6 full-time credentialed special education teachers, 2 part-time speech and language pathologists, 5 mental health clinicians, 3 part-time school psychologists, and an audiologist. Many of these staff members are bilingual, which is particularly important as we serve a predominantly Spanish-speaking community.

In addition, we are fully prepared to hire any necessary service providers a student's IEP may require through our established relationships with Non-Public Agencies (NPAs) and individual providers. Over the past few years, we have expanded many of our services to accommodate our growing SPED population. We're committed to ensuring that any student with IEP needs has access to the full range of services required for their success.

We believe that some families who need additional services may feel content in their current schools or may not yet be aware of the robust support we offer at ARISE. To address this, we are actively working to raise awareness about our program through community partnerships, including collaboration with middle school SPED programs. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with more SPED teams in OUSD middle schools to help support these students in accessing the opportunities we provide at ARISE.

6. What special education credentials do your staff have to provide the range of services needed by your students with IEPs? Who on your staff administers the California Alternate Assessment (CAA)? If you do not have staff with Moderate/Extensive Disabilities Credentials, what is your plan for hiring or contracting with staff who have those credentials?

Our special education teachers hold mild/moderate credentials, with all of them either having a Master's degree in Special Education or Child Development or currently pursuing their Master's. Our Director of Special Education is in the process of obtaining an autism certification and an extensive needs credential. Additionally, our Director of SPED has over 10 years of experience administering the California Alternate Assessment (CAA) and is responsible for overseeing its administration at our school.

7. Do any of your students with IEPs receive transportation services?

We provide free BART and bus tickets to all students, regardless of disability. However, at this time, none of our students with IEPs require additional transportation services. Should any student need further support, we are fully prepared to meet their needs.

8. No charter schools currently belong to OUSD's SELPA. During the period of your renewal, do you plan to join the OUSD SELPA, and if not, why not?

Not at this time. While we are open to ongoing conversations and have a strong working relationship with the OUSD SELPA, our current focus is on serving our students with IEPs to the highest standard. Being part of our current SELPA allows us to do just that. At this moment, the community is not interested in pursuing a change in SELPAs, as our current arrangement is working well for us.

9. How many students are newcomers (3 years or less in the USA)?

We currently have 35 students who arrived in the United States within the last three years, coming from diverse backgrounds including Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Peru, Nicaragua, and others. This number is changing every week though as we keep our doors open throughout the year.

10. When did we start our newcomer program, and how do you define a newcomer?

We started our newcomer program four years ago with the goal of creating a structured environment to welcome and support students who are new to the country, ensuring they receive the highest quality educational experience. My own background includes launching a similar program in Cambridge Public Schools, and as a former newcomer myself at age 15, I understand the importance of this work firsthand. To lead our program, we brought on Melissa Fully, a veteran EL/Newcomer Dean, who has extensive experience in designing and implementing programs for English learners and newcomers. We define a newcomer as a student who has arrived in the U.S. within the past three years.

Over the years, we have seen a significant increase in our newcomer program, with more and more students arriving throughout the school year. We keep our doors open to welcome students, even those who join as late as May or June. To ensure we can accommodate this growth, we stay flexible with both staffing and program design, allowing us to continue meeting the needs of newcomers and providing them with the support they need to succeed, no matter when they arrive. We also work closely with the Spanish Speaking Citizens Foundation, located near our campus, to provide support and enrichment programming to these students and their families as they get settled.

11. What is your plan to attract and serve all language learners (not just Spanish speakers)?

Our school has been proactive in collaborating with various other community organizations that specifically support newcomer populations, which has allowed us to attract and serve students who speak languages beyond Spanish. As a community school located in the Fruitvale area, we have experienced a notable increase in students whose first language is Mam, as well as students whose first language is Arabic. We have this year added translation services in Mam for all of our monthly family meetings, in addition to Spanish, and stand ready to add Arabic translation as the need arises. In addition to partnering with these organizations, we work closely with families to extend our outreach to their communities. This strong, collaborative approach is key to how we've successfully expanded our language learner program, ensuring we provide the necessary support for all students, regardless of their home language.

12. You serve no unhoused students, why is that? What are your plans to support that student population?

While our records may indicate that we currently serve no technically unhoused students, many of our families experience various levels of unstable housing that changes throughout the year. Even those who report having housing often face overcrowded and challenging living conditions, meaning they are underserved and underhoused. We also have many families that have interrupted housing access, but they do not mark unhoused in the forms that we send for state reporting. We recognize that housing instability affects many of our students and their ability to thrive. To address this, we are actively working with community organizations to support both our underhoused families and the unhoused population. By offering connections to essential services such as legal assistance, clothing, hygiene kits, medical support, and a weekly food pantry, we aim to meet the broader needs of our families and ensure that housing challenges are addressed. In addition, we have successfully connected a number of families with housing support services in recent years to prevent and remedy permanent unhoused statuses. We would welcome further collaboration with OUSD so that we are listed as a school of choice that provides a full spectrum of community services.

13. Demographics, what is our plan to shift our demographics - other than what you stated earlier? What has failed in the past and what are you trying differently to shift those numbers?

At ARISE, we recognize the need to diversify our student population, particularly with respect to our Black student population. While we have made strides in our Pro-Black Initiative, we understand there is still much work to be done to better reflect the rich diversity of Oakland, especially in serving Black students.

Since I came to ARISE in 2019, we have worked to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Black students, despite challenges like virtual learning during the pandemic and the OUSD "Enrollment Stabilization Policy" that limited our ability to recruit from OUSD middle schools. Historically, Black students at ARISE have felt less connected than our more represented Latinx population. However, through initiatives such as re-establishing our Black Student Union (BSU), strengthening and investing in our sports program, anti-racist and pro-Black PD, cohorting students, targeted recruitment efforts, and adding additional Black-identifying staff to provide culturally relevant support, we are beginning to see progress. Currently, our Black student enrollment for 9th grade has increased to 7.6%, with plans to continue growing this number.

What has changed from past efforts is a more targeted and structured approach to Black student recruitment, building stronger relationships with local middle schools and community centers that serve predominantly Black families. Our enrollment team gives

additional support and tours to underrepresented families to ensure that they feel welcome and fully informed about their decision to join ARISE. In addition, we are intentionally recruiting Black staff to create a more diverse faculty that reflects our student body. We are also working to provide increased support to our Black students through programs like cohorting, Black-led student circles, and planned field trips to locally Black owned businesses, museums, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to expose students to higher education opportunities.

Our ultimate goal is to increase our Black student population to 15% by 2028, while also fostering a school environment where Black students feel a strong sense of belonging and have the support to thrive. We remain flexible in our approach, continuously assessing our efforts through listening sessions, staff reflections, and direct feedback from our students and families.

14. Your SPED population jumped, how did this happen? Was this part of the long term growth of the program?

Our growing SPED population has been an intentional result of our efforts to improve and expand the program, as well as proactive outreach to middle schools, families, and community centers. We've made it a priority to ensure that the community understands that ARISE is a great option for students with IEPs to receive a high-quality education that prepares them for success after graduation.

We have designed our program to include students with IEPs in A-G requirements, dual enrollment courses, our career pathways, and internships. This has been achieved by intentionally building in the supports, scaffolds, and differentiation needed to ensure access to rigorous coursework without compromising the individual needs outlined in each student's IEP. Over the past five years, we've seen a steady increase in enrollment among students with IEPs, as well as an increase in students with higher needs. This growth can be attributed to our reputation for providing strong student support, including specialized IEP services, access to therapists, and additional academic support through our academic mentor program.

Our Director of SPED partners closely with our Head of School to design and continuously improve this program. Both leaders bring years of experience in SPED and have previously worked in schools with significantly higher numbers of students with IEPs, including those with high needs. This expertise has been instrumental in ensuring that we not only support our students effectively but also provide the necessary guidance and training for our teachers to meet the diverse needs of our SPED population. Their collaboration has allowed us to build a robust and responsive program that prioritizes student success and inclusion.

15. Most students received more than 450 minutes, what other services do you offer as well? More detail in what your program looks like?

We are an inclusion-based model, where most of our students are able to make academic progress within this environment. Alongside inclusion, we provide targeted academic pull-out groups, co-taught classes, behavior intervention services, and college and career counseling. We also support students with daily living skills instruction.

A key strength of our program is the daily executive functioning and case management provided by our Education Specialists during morning advisory, which helps students stay organized and on track. Additionally, we have a team of five therapeutic clinicians to address the social and emotional needs of our students who have minutes outlined in their IEPs as well as students who may not have ERMHS minutes but still request mental health support.

For specialized services, we have contracted providers, including a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) who is on-site weekly and an audiologist to support our Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students.

It's also important to note that while we don't count academic mentor support as IEP minutes, all students, including those with IEPs, benefit from individualized instruction provided by an additional adult in their classrooms through the academic mentor program. This extra layer of support further enhances the learning experience for our students.

16. You had 6 SPED teachers, did that include speech pathologist and OT?

The 6 SPED teachers do not include related service providers. We have 6 credentialed special education teachers with an average caseload of 12 students in addition to our related service providers. We believe these lower than average numbers for case managers allows us to fully serve all our students with fidelity. This has meant huge gains for our students with IEPs, high levels of support for our gen ed teachers, and for our students with IEPs to take advantage of our college courses, certification programs, and targeted interventions.

We currently provide a comprehensive range of services for students with IEPs, including 6 full-time credentialed special education teachers, 2 part-time speech and language pathologists, 5 mental health clinicians, 3 part-time school psychologists, and an audiologist. Many of these staff members are bilingual, which is particularly important as we serve a predominantly Spanish-speaking community.

17. Every graduate has to have two dual enrollment classes - if students take it earlier than their senior or junior year, then when do they take it? And how many can they take?

Our students follow a rigorous and intentionally designed sequence of dual enrollment (DE) courses, both on our campus and at multiple Peralta campuses. This sequence is scaffolded to ensure that students are gradually prepared for the demands of college-level coursework. Some students begin DE courses as early as 10th grade, though most start in 11th grade. The first introductory DE course is always held on campus, where students receive extensive support from a credentialed ARISE teacher. These classes are paired with a College Orientation curriculum that introduces students to the systems and rigors of college classes, including strategies for reading annotation, lecture note taking, and deadline tracking. This approach allows us to provide additional scaffolding, ensuring students are well-prepared before we slowly increase their independence and autonomy as they progress in their DE journey.

Our DE course sequence is thoughtfully aligned with each student's chosen pathway—either Public Health or Education—ensuring that their DE coursework is not only rigorous but also relevant to their future goals. Some of our on-campus classes are paired with off-campus labs, allowing students to experience college environments in a structured and supported way. Our close partnership with community colleges is pivotal in providing students with a smooth transition to higher education, and it allows us to offer a range of opportunities for students to access DE courses. Students who take advantage of the full scope and sequence for their pathway will graduate with professional certificates in early childhood or healthcare navigation halfway completed, which can be finished within a single year through Peralta.

We also recognize that not all students are ready for DE coursework. We provide a wide range of options: some students may be ready to begin DE courses as early as the summer after 9th grade, while others may take all their DE courses on campus during their senior year. This flexibility ensures that every student can engage with DE coursework at a pace that suits their needs. Additionally, we have a supportive process in place to waive the DE requirement for students with IEPs or English Learners/Newcomers who may benefit more from other on-campus courses. We make these decisions based on what will best support each student's success while maintaining the high standards we hold for all our students.

For students with IEPs and English Learners/Newcomers, we ensure that they receive appropriate differentiation, modifications, and accommodations to access DE coursework successfully. Our aim is to maintain both high rigor and high support, balancing the needs of individual students while ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities for academic growth and future success. We also participate in the Peralta Summer Institute where students can take a range of DE courses, with the support of ARISE staff serving as

hands-on summer mentors, ensuring they have the guidance they need to thrive in these courses.

Overall, our DE program is designed to be adaptable and responsive, ensuring that every student—regardless of their starting point or individual needs—can meet the high standards we set while receiving the support they need to succeed.

Here is our full Dual Enrollment scope and sequence aligned with our pathways:

<p>Education Pathway (Berkeley City College)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interpersonal Communications ● Child Growth & Development ● Psychology 	<p>Public Health Pathway (Merritt College)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medical Terminology ● Intro to Health Care Careers ● Genomics Theory
<p>Both Pathways: College Success (Laney College)</p>	
<p>Additional Peralta Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities: Pre-Calculus, Calculus, Physics, Chemistry, Emergency Medical Responder, Digital Animation, Intro to Business</p>	

**18. Why do you think you have retention issues at the school (in regards to AA students)?
How does the retention issue tend to play out?**

Retention challenges for African American students at our school aren't primarily due to other schools offering better support, but rather because those schools have a higher percentage of African American students. Some students have shared that they transfer out even though they are aware of what they're losing by leaving because they want to be in spaces with more Black students. However, in recent years, we've seen much stronger retention.

Through focus groups, students have expressed that the reasons they've stayed are the meaningful connections they've built, our growing sports program, and the presence of more Black staff, including a new dedicated therapist, Dean of School Culture, Math teacher, Dean of Restorative Justice, and Dean of Development. These elements have helped create a more supportive and affirming environment, contributing to our improved retention.

19. What is your secret to keeping and retaining teachers?

Our approach to retaining teachers includes several key elements that create a supportive and growth-oriented environment. We offer high-quality professional development where anyone leading PD is also an active classroom teacher, ensuring the training is relevant and grounded in real experience. We build a caring community of educators that support one another as we focus on our mission and vision. Every teacher has access to a coach, and we have academic mentors who provide additional classroom support, which is a tremendous resource for our educators and cuts down hours of prep, grading, and allows for additional

differentiation for our highest needs students. This in turn makes teaching more manageable and the type of mission driven work that sustains rather than depletes.

Anyone who is an instructional coach is also currently teaching in the classroom. This builds trust between teachers and coaches since everyone involved is currently dealing with similar students and helps bridge the divide between administration and teachers that can often fester and create burn out and discontent. We are really intentional about showing appreciation in small and big ways, and our staff feel seen and know that their work is valued and uplifted.

We're also intentional about providing outside professional development and conference opportunities to broaden our staff's skills. Hiring is done thoughtfully, and we support staff with strong stipends for leadership and coaching roles. Additionally, we protect specific days for grading, Anti-Racist PD, and collaboration, so teachers have dedicated time to focus on critical tasks and professional growth.

By combining these strategies, we create an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and part of a mission-driven community, which has been key to our strong teacher retention.