



Located on the John A. McManus Elementary School campus in Chico, California, the Wildflower School is a K-8 public charter school opening August 31 2011.

Mission:

The Wildflower Open Classroom (WOC) envisions an integrated thematic learning environment in which our community strives to create self-motivated, competent, and lifelong learners passionately committed to the celebration of diversity, stewardship of the earth, positive interpersonal relationships, appreciation of the arts, and academic excellence. WOC seeks to create a supportive student-centered learning environment that provides a standards-based curriculum where students can work both independently and cooperatively with others. We seek to educate the “whole child” by addressing the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of our students. The mission of WOC is to enable students to flourish through the use of innovative curriculum and instruction that empowers them to reach their innate intellectual, creative, and leadership potentials.

How Learning Best Occurs

The Wildflower Open Classroom philosophy puts the needs of the child first and foremost while integrating a high level of family involvement. Each classroom setting will be unique, reflecting the personalities of the teacher and students and unified by the following philosophies and principles.

- Every person in the learning community – every teacher, parent, and child – plays a role in creating and maintaining a meaningful, purposeful learning environment;
- Teachers will use a combination of collaborative, project based, and direct instruction that can include the whole class, groups (small and large) and individual instruction.
- Teachers use Integrated Thematic Curriculum, organizing learning around themes including all academic areas;
- Parents assist (“co-op”) in the classroom, which gives students more individualized attention from both parents and teachers;
- Multi-age/ grade or blended classrooms allow time for the following:
 - Opportunities for leadership roles for students;
 - Time to develop student-teacher relationships and academic goals;
 - Allows for struggling and less mature students to study in groups and more time and support for growth.
- Every child is seen as an individual, with his or her social, emotional, creative, cognitive and physical growth and development being considered and nurtured, at the same time academic needs are being addressed.

We believe that children learn best when:

- They are cared for in nurturing, safe, and supportive environments;
- They are actively involved in their learning, using hands-on, engaging manipulative materials, and constructing their own understanding;
- They help decide what they learn about based on curiosity, interests, needs, and desires, resulting in intrinsic motivation;
- They are free to learn at their own pace and in their own style;
- Their social and emotional needs are satisfied;
- They are valued for their unique learning abilities and styles;



- They take frequent field trips to the outside world to explore new places and to experience different activities, people, and environments;
- They are mixed with other students of different ages and abilities and can learn from one another

The Open Classroom philosophy is that students learn most effectively when they are immersed in authentic learning experiences where they can:

- Practice self-reliance;
- Assume responsibility for their individual learning;
- Develop positive self-esteem and confidence;
- Experience decision-making opportunities;
- Learn cooperatively in multi-aged settings;
- Identify connections between academic subjects and the outside world through an integrated thematic approach;
- Receive guidance and support from caring, licensed teachers; and from parents who actively participate in classroom activities and program operation.

Explanation of unique teaching/learning strategies

The Open Classroom will be a community of learners. Students, parents, and teachers will share the roles of teacher and learner, with teacher guidance.

The diversity of backgrounds and experience that students, parents and teachers bring to the classroom will enrich the entire Open Classroom community. Classrooms will not be isolated from the learning of the community. Multi-age classrooms will collaborate with each other.

Collaboration between students, parents, teachers and other community partners is an essential element of what makes the Open Classroom program unique and strong.

Observing and asking questions are key elements of how students, parents and teachers approach teaching and learning. Open-ended and higher level thinking questions allow learners the opportunity to actively reflect on their learning or behavior, rather than passively receiving information. Students and parents are encouraged and taught to ask questions, make requests, and propose ideas for learning activities that interest them or that they wish for the whole class. Students and parents are encouraged and supported to be active in their learning. Teachers use Integrated Thematic Curriculum as a basis for collaborative, hands-on learning.

- Positive Interpersonal Relationships
- Constructivist Learning
- Blended Classrooms/ Multiage Grouping
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Parents as teachers
- Students as teachers
- Teachers as teachers

Description of educational environment and classroom structure

Educating the "whole child" is the tenet that drives the environment within each classroom and allows for the academic, social, emotional, creative, aesthetic and physical growth and development of each



student. The classrooms will all be similar in a variety of ways, part of the "common thread" that aligns Open Classroom classrooms with its philosophy.

Classrooms will be, at all times, "kid friendly" and developmentally appropriate. Classrooms will be warm and welcoming. They will always display student art work, writing, and on-going as well as completed projects in a variety of curriculum disciplines. These student artifacts will provide evidence of past, current, and sometimes future learning.

Each classroom will have a large, open space for gathering, where the entire classroom's learning community (students, parents, and teacher) gathers several times each day. Everyone will be seated together on the floor, for a wide variety of activities: planning and organizing, business and announcements, sharing, problem solving, curriculum discussions, whole class lessons, read aloud, guest speakers, and presentations by students, parents or guests.

Classrooms will each have a separate space, e.g., a loft, which allows students the opportunity to work alone or with others in a smaller, more intimate work space. Rooms may have sofas, comfortable over-stuffed chairs, rocking chairs, and/or unusual furniture items that will add to the kid-friendly environment of the learning space. Rooms will have a variety of tables that support small group learning. In addition, each classroom will have independent work spaces for either individual or partner work to occur. Because collaboration is a vital and key element of the Open Classroom philosophy, students will move throughout the classroom, working with others and seeking help and support as needed. Each classroom will also provide teachers and parents' space, for announcements, literature, scheduling, curriculum supplies, and community materials.

Blended grade classrooms (multi-age) are an important element in our school. Educational research shows that multi-aged learning environments facilitate individualized instruction where teachers focus on each student's needs rather than grade level expectations. They also broaden the social peer group for children, offering a wider possibility of friendship choices.

In tune with the Open Classroom philosophy of being a "community of learners", all classrooms will have items that support this sense of community. Classrooms may not have individual student desks but instead the classrooms may provide shared tables and spaces within the classrooms where students may benefit from group work experiences. Supplies (paper, crayons, rulers, scissors, compasses, staplers, etc.) will all be located in a shared, community space, to be used as needed by anyone. Ideally, each classroom will support a large area, or "kitchen", for cooking and nutrition, science learning, and art. Each student will have frequent and easy access to the computers. Students may have a personal mailbox for messages and notes, as well as an individual "cubby", file box, tote tray, or locker for personal books or learning materials. Many times during a school day small groups of students may work outside their own classroom, sometimes needing more space to spread out, sometimes needing privacy to produce a play or work on a readers' theater workshop. This space will be considered part of the Open Classroom learning environment.

Students and co-ops may meet in small groups in other public spaces in the school, or outside (e.g., the hallways, garden or playgrounds). Also, many Open Classroom learning opportunities will take place off campus. This will be facilitated by the presence of parents and other community partners who can assist in planning off-campus activities and in transporting and managing groups of students at a variety of learning venues.

The Open Classroom students will produce a variety of projects throughout the school year, as supported by the Open Classroom philosophy that children learn by being actively involved in the learning process.



The Open Classroom requires large spaces to store on-going learning projects until projects are completed and shared with classmates, parents, and frequently other classrooms. Parents also need room to store their teaching and curriculum supplies. The Open Classroom will have a large and extensive children's library, with multiple copies of books for literature studies. This library will be used and shared by all Open Classroom classrooms. The Open Classroom will also have a large and extensive parent resource library, supporting parents learning about the Open Classroom philosophy of education, curriculum and co-oping. In addition, the Open Classroom will have "overall program" storage for large or periodically used items (e.g., Annual Carnival and Winter Concert props and decorations).

Finally, it will be expected that the upper grades will have a common area where they can meet together to organize their day using planners or other tools, work on current projects they have going on, catch up on homework, seek tutoring or mentoring from adult facilitators, and socialize.

Goals of the program are:

1. To create a child-centered, parent-supported and teacher-directed public school that emphasizes instruction that builds on students' interests in a collaborative way, where some of the learning activities are planned by children and parents under the guidance of the teacher. Additionally, parents provide enhancement activities to support a teacher-directed, child-centered curriculum.
2. To educate the whole child, addressing individual students' academic, social, emotional, creative, cognitive and physical growth and development.
3. To provide education about the local and global environment and sustainability and be involved in on and off campus projects.
4. The Open Classroom learning environment is constructed to foster students in becoming:
 - complex thinkers and problem solvers
 - effective communicators
 - cooperative group participants and leaders
 - contributors to the community
 - quality workers and producers
 - self-directed learners

Please contact us (below) with any questions or comments.