

Educational Milestone

Santa Monica's Pluralistic School 1 celebrates 50 years

By Andres de Ocampo

Pluralistic School 1 (PS1), a Santa Monica-based private elementary school, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this fall.

The school, which serves grades K-6, offers a unique and impactful approach to education, which they call pluralism. PS1 "nurtures children's social-emotional development, creativity and interconnectedness using pluralism as both the goal and the method," according to their website.

Joel Pelcyger, PS1's founder and head of school, explained that the idea of the school was birthed in 1970, in collaboration with Eleanor Coben and Mel Suhd, after questioning the traditional school system in America and wanting to change the way children were schooled.

In 1971, PS1 opened with six students and twelve teachers. Twenty-eight students enrolled by 1972 and in 1975 PS1 settled in their permanent location on Euclid Street in Santa Monica.

"My path (in education) was to start our



PHOTO CREDIT: MARISSA ROSELLIER

(Continued on page 16) Independent K-6 school Pluralistic School 1 (PS1) in Santa Monica is celebrating 50 years in education this fall.



Ecole Claire Fontaine



Art, Language & Nature School
Honoring the Wisdom of Children



Enrolling 2- 7 Year Olds for 2021-2022

Camper Campus, Abbot Kinney & Fontaine Campus

Architecture, Baking, French, Mathematics, Mindfulness, Music, Poetry, Reading, Spanish, Sewing, Writing, Yoga & more

Organic Lunch, Certified Wildlife Habitat, World-Class Faculty & Joyful Atmosphere

Inquiries: Bonjour@LAClairefontaine.org

LAClairefontaine.org

An Education Embracing Discovery, Inspiration, and Innovation

By Westside Neighborhood School

Westside Neighborhood School is a leading independent school for PS-8th grade students in the heart of Silicon Beach. WNS believes community is the foundation for nurturing innovative and creative thinking. Every day, we create meaningful opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds to collaborate and learn from each other.



Our shared future benefits from their informed compassion. The school's program is built on four pillars: Academic Excellence; Character; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Community. Faculty members model what they teach: respect and responsibility, love of teaching and joy of learning, sense of humor, open communication, and teamwork. Students are encouraged to be creative, independent, and self-disciplined. We believe in the importance of fostering resilience in our students and value perseverance, effort, and learning from our mistakes.

WNS students understand the importance of community while respecting individual differences. Our goal is to instill in our students a love of learning, cultural sensitivity, and a deep understanding of our world both in and outside the classroom.

WNS is getting ready to safely welcome all students back to in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year in accordance with local guidelines. For more information regarding our Return to School Plan, we invite you to visit our website.

To learn more about WNS and the admission process, visit wns-la.org

ADVERTORIAL

EDUCATIONAL MILESTONE

(Continued from Page 14)

own school,” he said. “Sometimes schools are named after the street they’re on or the person that started it; ours is based on an idea. With the questions ‘How do you make society a better place?’ and ‘How do you make life better for each child?’ in mind... you build on those ideas and out comes the school.”

“E pluribus unum,” a Latin phrase and the nation’s motto meaning “out of many, one,” is the inspiration for PS1’s name and, coupled with a vision to change schooling for children, provides a unique cornerstone for the school.

Pelcyger explained how the Latin phrase ties into the school’s philosophy of pluralism: “You start realizing everybody’s different. It’s the differences among us that are the most interesting, it’s not how we are the same as everybody else. It’s the uniqueness of each

being, that our backgrounds are different from each other. The idea of pluralism is, ‘Out of many,’ or recognizing our differences, and ‘one,’ what can we build together.”

John Waldman, a 26-year PS1 teacher who has the unique experience of teaching both of his children when they were in 5th grade, says that PS1 is about helping with the development of the students alongside teaching them.

“When this job became available to me, I thought that this job is what my philosophy of education is, which is speaking to the individual and helping to develop the individual to be a part of the community,” Waldman said.

Pelcyger elaborated on how PS1 strives to make an impact on their students, which speaks to their philosophy, by making them feel like they matter.

“You have to start by making everyone feel empowered, like they make a

difference,” he said. “If you have that idea in mind and you work towards it, then pluralism can happen.”

The idea of pluralism manifests itself in many ways at PS1, according to Pelcyger, in students and the teaching staff. For students, it might be that during circle time they might talk with their classmates about what it means to be different or what they are proud of about themselves.

For staff, pluralism shows in their teaching and their evaluations. Before writing an evaluation, all teachers must first discuss what they honor, value and cherish about each student, Pelcyger said.

There are no grades given to students at PS1, and from a teacher’s perspective, Waldman explained PS1’s no-grade approach to education: “In a graded environment, the grade often becomes the end all or be all. It becomes defining

and, in that environment, a child can perceive themselves to be something, and it can be inhibiting. At PS1, that’s not our perspective.”

Though there are metrics for student evaluations from teachers, Pelcyger said he believes that elementary school is more about engagement, expressing yourself, being open to opinions of others and developing critical thinking. Performance and achievement have a place in elementary school, along with meeting academic goals, but it should start later, he said.

“It makes you step back and think that it’s more than reading, writing and arithmetic. It’s more than a project that students work on,” Pelcyger said. “Those things are important but, in the end, it’s about who the students are as a person and what they’re going to take from this

(Continued on page 18)



PHOTOS CREDIT: MARISSA ROSELLIER



The school offers a unique and impactful approach to education, which they call pluralism, that nurtures children’s social-emotional development, creativity and interconnectedness using pluralism as both the goal and the method.

Vote for Us Best Nonprofit Organization

SAFE PLACE FOR YOUTH PROVIDES LIFE-SAVING SUPPORT TO OVER 1,200 YOUNG PEOPLE ANNUALLY.

We rely on our community now more than ever. Here is how you can help during this challenging time:

- Donate basic survival items from our Amazon wishlist
- Donate funds to SPY to help us continue supporting our housed and street-based youth
- Volunteer your time in one of our programs on-site or virtually

www.safeplaceforyouth.org

S . P . Y
safe place for youth



Located in the heart of Santa Monica, PS1 Pluralistic School is a coeducational day school for children in grades K-6. At PS1, pluralism is our highest aspiration—for our children and our world. It also describes our methods for achieving that goal. The school's name intentionally echoes our nation's motto, E pluribus unum: Out of many, one. As our students master essential skills and knowledge, we ensure they understand themselves as individual learners and human beings, and as members of numerous larger communities.

Why does pluralism matter? By attending to each child as a unique and valued individual, we build a kind, cooperative, dynamic learning community that models the larger world as we think it can and should be: one that considers, honors, and welcomes every person, so all can joyfully contribute their best selves to the greater good. When your child spends their earliest years in this carefully designed educational environment, they step forth prepared and energized to put their values into practice wherever they go. Today, we need such delightful, dedicated, effective thinkers and citizens more than ever.

For more information visit: www.psone.org

ADVERTORIAL

To expand your child's compassion and ambition

start with **1**



At PS1, children grow up in—and help shape—an exceptionally joyful, empathetic, dynamic learning community. From this intentionally created microcosm your child emerges excited and prepared to change the wider world for the better.



www.psone.org · 310-394-1313 X 107

Inquire & Connect with Us!

Apply Online Now!

EDUCATIONAL MILESTONE

(Continued from Page 16)

school when they go on in life.” Richard Turner, whose daughter attends PS1, recalled a time when everything was academically well with his daughter, but that she was quiet and observant and he wanted her “to advocate for herself.

After some discussion with teachers and Pelcyger, they suggested to Turner that his daughter should join the student council to find her voice.

“It was out-of-the-box thinking,” Turner said. “She got to meet other friends and she felt like she was doing something to help the school and she found her voice in the process.”

The 50th anniversary and upcoming events the school has planned are exciting for everyone involved in the PS1 community, with the biggest events being held in April and May. The plans for the anniversary include bringing alumni back to the school to see their classmates and organizing the events by decade, which coincides with who students might have known during their time at PS1.

There will also be a speaker series where PS1 will bring in people from different backgrounds to talk about pluralism in their career field and how pluralism comes together and plays a role in their thinking. Pelcyger encourages



Joel Pelcyger is PS1's founder and head of school.

PHOTO CREDIT: MARISSA ROSELLIER

people to visit the PS1 website for updates and more information.

Coupled with the 50-year anniversary, PS1 will be going through another big change in 2023 when Pelcyger will retire from being the head of the school.

“It feels good,” Pelcyger said. “PS1 has always been my baby, but my baby is 50 years old...Something that I’ve been able to give the school through the years is stability and I think that the school will continue to have consistency and stability. The people who will run PS1 will make it better.”

Pelcyger said that he is optimistic for the future of PS1 and that he embraces the future changes and evolution that the school will go through.

Waldman’s perspective as a teacher is a hopeful one and he has confidence that the PS1 community will carry on the essence of the school navigate changes accordingly.

“The essence of the school is not going to change because people are here for of the essence of the school,” he said. “Be excited by the prospect of change. [Joel’s retirement] is not going to change who PS1 is fundamentally but expect that who we become is going to speak to the needs of the children and families in the future.” ■

The Westside has become a top destination for people who love great food.



Let hungry Argonaut readers know you're OPEN! Indoor & Outdoor dining • Take-out • Delivery

Help your eatery stand out from the crowd – because our audience has the means and ability to dine out often, you want them to think of your establishment when hunger calls.

TheArgonaut CALL TODAY: 310.463.0633



SYCAMORE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

For these passionate educators, the past year provided an opportunity to reimagine education and open the doors of Sycamore Community School! This new TK-8 independent school offers an innovative mission and whole-child approach to education.

School Highlights

- Engaging research-based curriculum
- Experienced educators
- Low teacher-student ratio
- Affordable tuition
- High school preparation
- Frequent and meaningful field trips
- Emphasis on social-emotional learning
- Reading-centric school culture
- Extended day program

Educational Philosophy

Sycamore’s program is rooted in academic excellence and personal growth. The school is named after the native Sycamore tree that flourishes in Los Angeles, symbolizing the desire for students to become resilient and positive contributors to our community. The culture of Sycamore Community School focuses on independence, creativity, compassion, and kindness with robust research-based academics.

Additionally, the small class sizes facilitate differentiation allowing teachers to best support students while executing powerful hands-on educational experiences with fidelity. A low student-to-teacher ratio and ample outdoor spaces cater to outdoor learning and consistent in-person instruction, along with a vaccinated faculty. Sycamore Community School will prepare students to be successful and well-rounded people.

Weekly informational sessions and school tours are available! Visit: www.sycamorecommunityschool.org

ADVERTORIAL