

PAGOSA PEAK OPEN SCHOOL



ANNUAL REPORT
2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR





2018-2019

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MEET OUR SCHOOL DIRECTOR

ANGELA REALI CROSSLAND



Angela comes to PPOS from Durango, and education reform and charter schools of choice have been at the heart of her educational career. She has an MA, Teaching Secondary Science from the University of Phoenix; a BS, Natural Resource Management and Environmental Education; and holds a State of Colorado Professional Teacher License–Secondary Science Endorsement.

Throughout her career Angela has held many teaching positions including time as an Advanced Physics Teacher at Animas High School, Science Teacher at Pikes Peak School of Expeditionary Learning, and Lead Science Teacher at James Irwin Charter High School. Most recently, Angela worked at Mountain Middle in Durango as the Instructional Guide, Grant Coordinator and Assessment Coordinator. During Angela's tenure at Mountain Middle School she contributed to the organizational changes and high achievement of the project-based learning school. In her first year, Mountain Middle climbed from the bottom 10% of schools in Colorado to the top 12% of schools. She contributed to this success by leading professional development, training teachers, supporting staff and supporting a culture of excellence, growth mindset and a positive learning culture. She enjoys the small environment and close student/teacher relationships that charter schools promote, as well as the critical and in-depth thinking that project based learning fosters. In her spare time Angela enjoys canoeing, backpacking, snowboarding, photography, woodworking and her new found hobby of paddleboarding.

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Families,

A look back at the last year of Pagosa Peak Open School provides insight into our future and memories to celebrate. PPOS has carved out a place in our community where children contribute to their learning, participate in meaningful projects, and experience rigor in multi-age environments.

My transition into this community began at the end of the school's second year, when students were deep in their gardening work, theatre camp and outdoor art projects. James Lewicki, the previous school's director, handed over a hardworking staff dedicated to their students, families supportive of a PBL model, and students who were called by name by every person in the building. The intimacy was quickly identifiable. Teachers supported teachers. Students supported students. James' commitment to relationships became the springboard for our school's current work plan: from here we could push forward with Restorative Practices, student data analysis and individualized planning, backward designing of projects and frameworks to streamline operational systems.

Since I've been here, teachers have taken new risks with their curriculums, dedicated hours toward professional development, reflected on their practices and celebrated student successes in big ways (such as evening celebrations of learning) and small ways (such as gratitude rocks and Town Hall appreciations). At PPOS we embrace life-long learning; not just as an expectation for our students but also for ourselves.

As we move forward, we will continue to dive in, get stuck and push through. We will provide for ourselves what we want for our students: opportunities to grapple with complex concepts, growth mindsets that allow us to learn from our mistakes, and celebrations of risks taken.

Thank you for your support through this transition year ahead and celebrating where we came from.



OUR WORK PLAN

As a school of choice in Pagosa Springs we are looking at building upon our strengths and improving in areas to better meet our mission and vision. In order to do this, we have set 4 goals to achieve over the school year. The first goal is; “Students and staff are given an opportunity to grow and develop in a community that values positive character interactions and actions.” We believe that in order to reach their academic potential a student first needs to reach their social and emotional potential first. The second goal is; “Data is being used by staff, students, and families to assess the current strengths and challenges of students in all subject areas. This data is then used to drive instruction at the whole class, small group, and individual level.” Over the past two years, we have gathered data on our students that have helped to see where our students are performing and have allowed us to help the families to understand where their student is academically. In the future, we would like to

use this data more to drive instruction, help students take ownership of their learning and to support differentiation in the classroom. The founding parents envisioned a project-based learning/place-based education model that engaged students to learn and help them thrive both emotionally and socially. This is at the heart of the third goal of; “The school has created a culture of academic excellence by implementing Project-Based instructional methods across the subjects as the main delivery method of instruction. This includes projects that are Place-Based.” Over the past year, we have created many systems and structures as we build our school. As the school grows we will review these systems and structures and ensure that they are up to date and are in line with our mission and vision of the original charter application. This work will be supported with the fourth and final goal of; “Systems and structures are in place to create clear and transparent expectations for all staff, students, and families.”



Our Mission: Creating a community of empowered, lifelong learners by providing a multi-age learning environment designed to foster confidence, high academic achievement, and the joy of learning through original and meaningful work.

ANIMAL CANS

PPOS STUDENTS ENGAGE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO CLEAN UP OUR ENVIRONMENT

During an Earth Day activity where PPOS students collected hundreds of pieces of garbage along the new bike path outside our elementary school's playground, a group of students noticed a lack of trash cans. They were distressed and immediately threw their energy into addressing this issue. A months-long project to collect data on the issue began, and eventually they decided to share their findings with an authentic audience.

In a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation (complete with graphs) at a town council meeting, six students made a strong argument for the installation of trash cans along the path. The mayor smiled, the council members clapped, and the audience gave a standing ovation. The town voted in favor of the project.

Fifteen months later, the town manager showed up on our doorstep with a message: the foundation had been laid and he now needed help installing three animal shaped trash cans along the path outside our fence. The designs were based on their suggestions, the placement of each trash can reflected the data they graphed more than a year ago. Students raced along with the town parks crew; reflecting on how long it had taken, how much effort had gone into it, and how their actions and perseverance had impacted their entire community.



SNOW SCIENCE

CONNECTING STUDENTS TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT

At the beginning of February, Pagosa Peak Open School ventured to Sonlight Camp for an educational exploration of snow science hosted by Audubon Rockies to learn how snow affects our mountain community. In addition to snowshoeing and animal tracking, our students used scientific tools such as magnifying glasses and thermometers to compare temperatures, crystal shapes and layers of snow.

After discussing different snow crystal shapes and how snowflakes are formed, K-3rd grade classes read a special book, *Over and Under the Snow*, that details life in the subnivean zone, that is life under the snow. To survive the winter, the subnivean zone is where animals make their dens, tunnels and burrows.

Card games helped our children learn how to match a track to its corresponding animal. Students discovered that animal tracking can tell a fascinating story. They individually used animal track stamps to create a story and then retold their stories to each other as a group. After this fun exercise, students strapped on some snowshoes to learn how to walk, waddle, run and jump like animals in the snow. They even found some wild turkey tracks to observe!

To understand snow and temperature, the children dug a pit to the ground and measured the temperature at several different levels. At the top of the pit the temperature was 23 degrees, but as the students measured towards the ground, they were surprised to find the temperature actually rose all the way to 33 degrees at ground level.

Our 3rd through 5th grade students learned through three content stations set up by Audubon Rockies. One station focused on winter adaptation. They discussed how traits and characteristics that allow animals to survive in the San Juan Mountains. Students then sculpted imaginary animals in the snow capable of surviving in this portion of the Rocky Mountains. At the end of this station, students proceeded through a "gallery walk" to show off their respective "critters" and explain what adaptations allow them to survive.

At another station these 3rd through 5th grade students also discovered the movement of animals in the snow through snowshoeing, tracking and an observational hike.





They identified the three P's, Print, Pattern, Place that help one with the detective work of identifying tracks of what critters are on the landscape. Students learned how to group different mechanisms of moving thru the snow. Is the animal a Walker (deer, coyote), a Hopper (snowshoe hare), a Bounder (weasels), or a Waddler (bear)?

The final Audubon Rockies station had students digging snow pits, identifying and counting layers in the snow and discussing the history of winter that can be discerned from examining snow layers. Students calculated snow water equivalent (SWE), what percentage of a given snow pack would be reduced to water if it were to melt instantaneously. This directly impressed upon students the impact of snowfall on the Pagosa Springs community. How does water impact our recreational tourism? Agriculture? Wildfire resiliency?

Our students connected with their community through discussions around San Juan Mountain wildlife and the importance of snow to our county. This introduction to our winter environment deepens not only children's understanding of their surroundings, but also their relationship with it. By participating in such activities, students engage in place-based learning specific to Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

Pagosa Peak Open School goes beyond the interdisciplinary approach to include our students' community and local environment. We focus on the concept of growing the whole child. They are building relationships with our natural surrounding as well as with each other. Simply enjoying a walk through the quiet woods in winter gave them a better understanding of snow, of how it packs and how it settles.

At Sonlight Camp, through snow science exploration, the students learned about Pagosa's regional impact. They are learning specifically how snowpack affects the economics of our area and the Western United States. We are teaching our children how to live responsibly upstream and think downstream.



OUR GARDENING YOUTH

FROM GROW DOMES TO THE FARM

In downtown Pagosa Springs, situated near the San Juan River and world-famous hot springs, three impressive and large dome structures sit next to the quaint river walk. One dome in particular supports education. Inside of this dome, a wide array of plants grow year-round, thanks to the care of the Geothermal Greenhouse Partnership (GGP). The appropriately named "Education Dome" is where Kelle Bruno's 1st and 2nd grade class spent the chilly winter months planting, harvesting and learning.

High altitude gardening can be a difficult obstacle to those above 5,000ft at any age, but PPOS students have overcome the elements here in Pagosa Springs to grow plants year-round. Due to a unique opportunity with the GGP, PPOS students can get their hands in the dirt and experience the life cycle of a variety of plants even when the ground is covered in several feet of snow.

"As far as growing lessons, they all know that plants need soil, water, nutrients, light, and space to thrive," says Ms. Bruno. "My class can tell you all of the parts of a plant and what a seed is. They enjoy walking into the hot, humid space in the middle of winter."

"They get really into the changes of the plants from week to week and they also like taking produce back to school and preparing it into a salad or a morning snack for the rest of the class." "I had an especially memorable day with a group last year where we did a sensory lesson. The kids were asked to use their 5 senses and then write about their experience. One student wrote, 'This broccoli tastes like victory!'

One PPOS 1st grader, Lotus, whose favorite vegetable is a tomato, excitedly tells of how she has "fun putting hands in the dirt" and "planting plants and seeing worms". This is Lotus's first experience working in the garden and she thinks the GGP domes "look like giant igloos."





As the season rapidly turns to spring Ms. Bruno's students will move their gardening to Ms. Bruno's Colorado Proud Certified farm, Southern Roots.

"We are really fortunate to be able to use the (GGP) space as a greenhouse to start our plants for the summer. We will likely plant tomatoes, peppers, annual flowers, herbs, broccoli, and cabbages to be grown at school in our small garden as well as at our 1/8-acre property at my house."

Southern Roots is where PPOS students will take their gardening to the land and produce crops for a special CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) project available to PPOS families. On April 25th, during the Spring Student Showcase, 10 families won a free, eight-week CSA provided by Southern Roots. The CSA ran July 8th-August 30th, providing these families with fresh, local veggies during these two summer months.



No matter the challenges of our climate or altitude, PPOS maintains a Place-based education model that encourages gardening and outdoor learning. PPOS believes that outdoor education provides meaningful contextual experiences in both natural and constructed environments. This education can occur both inside and outside the classroom, both inside a grow dome structure and outside on a farm. For PPOS students learning will take place beyond the four walls of the classroom.



REAL LIFE MATH

HOW 2ND AND 3RD GRADE STUDENTS LEARNED THE BEAUTY OF GIVING BACK

On May 9th, after weeks of hard work managing money collected from their class store, Ms. Robyn's 2nd and 3rd grade class took their earnings to the cats and dogs. During the school's Spring Student Showcase in April, this class managed a store in the lobby, selling bracelets, clay figurines, pillows, paper ornaments, and toys to raise funds to "Save the Animals".

Continuing their philanthropic dive into the world of money and charitable giving, Pagosa Peak Open School's students visited the Humane Society of Pagosa Springs with giving on their minds. The students bubbled with excitement as they left school. Once on the van en route, a student exclaimed, "We are on the magic school bus, going to see the animals!"

Upon arrival, half of the class played with cats and half went to play with the puppies and make dog treats. Then they switched. The students spent \$105 of their hard earned money on food and treats for the animals. They also donated \$35.24 in a cash donation to help with the cost of vaccinations for the animals.

One student, Isaac, wanted to take all the puppies home. "I love them all!" he said joyfully. Oliver, another student, already has a puppy picked out to adopt. This project taught our children more than a math problem. It taught retail concepts, marketing ideas, change-making skills and how to take a profit and invest it directly back into society. These students had an honest interest in money, and through a class-initiated project, experienced real life application. They learned how to get money, how to manage money and how to spend money to benefit others.

As Pagosa Peak Open School continues to teach through a Project-based learning model, we encourage our students to apply learning to whole projects that will stick with them throughout their lives. As 3rd grader Asha put it: "This is amazing!"



FUNDING OVERVIEW

STATE & FEDERAL FUNDING

PPOS is a public school, so we receive funding from both the State of Colorado and the federal government for each student enrolled in the school. Funding for education comes from the state, local property and federal taxes.

GRANT SUPPORT

We apply for grant funding to support student-led projects, our building purchase, school supplies, transportation, etc.

PRIVATE DONATIONS

Donations allow us to be more flexible with where our money goes such as hiring more support staff, purchasing our building and taking students on field trips.

PARTNERS/PATRONS

LPEA, Wend Ventures, Ballentine Family Fund, Onward!, Simmons Family Foundation, FACE, Parelli Natural Horsemanship, Rotary Club of Pagosa Springs, Pagosa Brewing Co., Courtney King Studios, Community United Methodist Church, Audubon Rockies, Geothermal Greenhouse Partnership, Southern Roots Farm

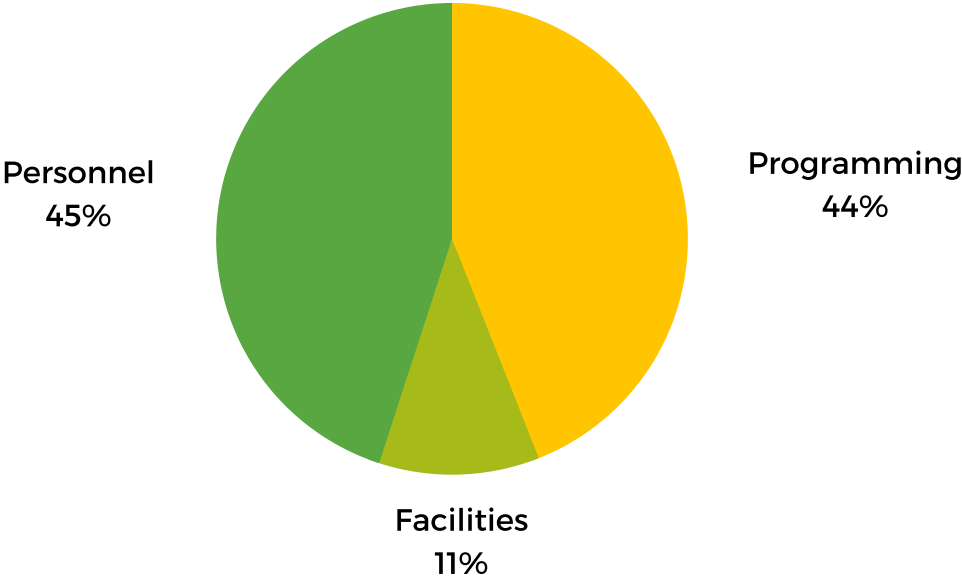
PPOS OVERALL FUNDING

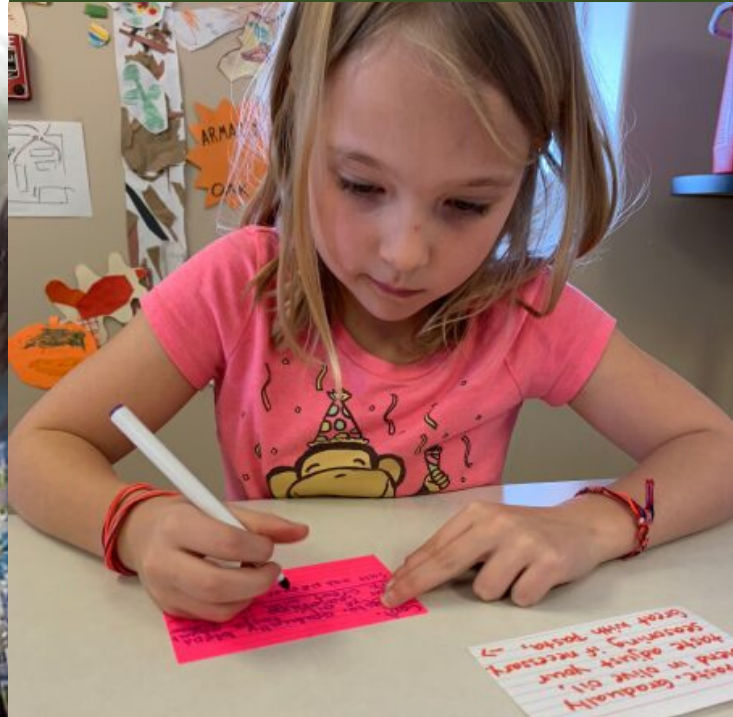
Pagosa Peak Open School receives funding from PPR (Per Pupil Revenue - State), private donations and grants (private foundations, state, federal and corporations).



HOW WE SPEND FUNDS

Pagosa Peak Open School spent 11% of funding on Facilities (\$134,750.66), 44% on Programming (\$516,351.25) and 45% on Personnel (\$535,691.75).





What is a Charter School?

- Charter schools are public schools and tuition-free!
- A charter school operates separately from the school district and has its own board of directors.
- Charter schools are accredited.
- Charter schools accept students with IEP and 504 plans.
- Charter schools are mandated to participate in state testing.
- Charter schools offer a place for alternative learning experiences.

WHAT IS AN OPEN SCHOOL?

The term "Open School" comes from the belief that children have a natural desire to learn. This desire is cultivated by giving children many ways to seek knowledge specifically through what interests them the most. In the open school environments, children are introduced to "hands-on" experiences. Teachers are there to assist the learning process by observing, guiding, and providing materials for the students. This type of learning gives children more confidence and real-life skills. Pagosa Peak Open School is an open school that emphasizes Place-based, Project-based and mixed-age learning.

Find out more about us!

www.pagosapeakopenschool.org

