



# PORT TOWNSEND

## School District

LEARNING THROUGH A SENSE OF PLACE

### **Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) Work Group Board Report June 2022**

#### **1. Background**

The ALE Work Group convened during the 2021-22 school year to work with the recommendations from the [OCEAN Study](#) conducted in 2021 by Ann M. Renker, PhD and Don Lloyd, MS. The group met 13 times over the school year and included teachers, school board members, current and former OCEAN families, and community members.

#### **2. Work Group Membership:**

Kelli Parcher, Amber L.L.A Jones, Lisa Olsen, Tanya Barnett, Heather McRae-Woolf, Daniel Molotsky, Katie Johnson, Kim Jacoban, Kurt Munnich, Bridgette Ramsey, Sarah Rubenstein, Doug Ross, Connie Welch, MB Armstrong

#### **3. Work Group Process**

The group examined the OCEAN Study and identified areas of the study that were best addressed through a committee and those areas that would be best addressed by staff action. As the committee continued with its work, gaps in services were identified: some have been addressed, while some remain to be explored.

The work group conducted a set of Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) and Threat, Opportunity, Weakness, and Strengths (TOWS) analyses to examine the OCEAN K-12 School and OCEAN Students population. These assessments helped identify many of the strengths of the program, as well as areas for improvement.

Important takeaways:

- There are many students and families with positive experiences in OCEAN.
- Relationships and small classes are a reason many students come to OCEAN.
- The current program may not be well suited for students without family support, so an expanded program model may be needed.
- High school students needing more support do not have other alternatives in Port Townsend.
- The structure of OCEAN works for many students with anxiety and other social-emotional needs, while some may need additional support or services.

Through this process a number of possible strategies emerged as potential next steps:

- Visit other ALE programs to learn and explore new models.
- Create program entrance criteria or expectations to publish and share with the community.
- Create a vision for alternative learning in the district.
- Create a plan for tracking data to measure student success.
- Examine solutions for high school students who are not on track for on time graduation.
- Explore stronger connections to trades and job readiness programs.
- Include district-adopted core curriculum in OCEAN curriculum as appropriate for the program model.

The process also allowed us to examine more deeply the wide variety of students who may benefit from alternative learning. There was a general consensus that the structure of OCEAN generally meets the needs of these groups of students:

- Students seeking more experiential learning, either with a Career and Technical Education or an academic focus.
- Parents who want a non-traditional education environment.
- Advanced learners who are seeking ways to create independent challenges for themselves.
- Students with responsibilities or circumstances that make attending full-time school difficult (i.e. family caregiving, working, and/or not having permanent housing).

The group recognized that there may be a need to examine how the program model could better serve the below groups of students:

- Students with mental health challenges (anxiety, depression, etc.).
- Students with IEPs/special education needs, who may also be seeking smaller class sizes.
- Students who are not on track to graduate in four years (often for some of the previously mentioned circumstances) and who need credit recovery.
- Older students, 18-21 year olds (either for HS diploma or GED pathway).

#### **4. Qualities of an OCEAN Teacher**

The ALE Study indicated that consideration was needed for hiring staff that are the right fit for our ALE model. The workgroup spent a session discussing the qualities and qualifications of an OCEAN teacher. Feedback from this session will be used in writing future OCEAN teacher job postings and interview questions.

#### **5. Crafting a District ALE Vision**

Through this year-long process the group crafted a district vision for alternative learning. The process involved getting family, student, and community input on the vision in addition to the work group members. Below is a recommended vision statement, core strategies, and district commitment. The work group recommends formal adoption of this statement by the board.

## **PT Schools Alternative Learning Vision Statement**

*Port Townsend School District recognizes the need for Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs in partnership with students, families, and the community for students who seek personalized learning plans. The ALE programs honor the diverse needs and identities of all our learners, and seek to meet students where they are and to nurture them along the path they choose. We are committed to giving all students the support necessary to reach their full potential, and to be prepared for their future in our dynamic world.*

## **Core Strategies for Personalized Learning**

- Place Based and Project Based Learning: Learning focused on connecting to the local community or through real-world meaningful activities.
- Online and Blended Learning: Using online and computer based learning in combination with in-person and independent learning.
- Independent Study: A course of study that a student completes on their own with teacher support. This usually includes a weekly work log and a portfolio.
- Portfolios: A collection of student work over the course of study to show student growth.
- Work-Based Learning: School credit for paid employment.
- Student Interest-Based Learning: Learning centered around student-identified areas of interest.

## **District Commitment**

In support of all learners, district leadership commits to:

- Offering thriving ALE programs through an ongoing collaboration with students, families, and the community.
- Maintaining transparent communication with all these stakeholder groups.
- Engaging with a continuous assessment of ALE program resources to ensure that the required services are available to meet student and community needs.

## **6. Additional Staff Work Completed in Response to the ALE Study**

### **Support for the formation of an OCEAN K-12 ASB**

A group of students and parents came together with the support of OCEAN staff and began the formation of a school wide ASB. Students held weekly meetings, drafted a constitution, held mascot elections, and held ASB elections. Student leaders will attend an Association of Washington Student Leaders Summer program to support school climate and culture development next year. The OCEAN ASB would like to have a student school board representative.

### **OSPI Recovery Grants to Support Student Learning Recovery**

OCEAN staff applied for and were awarded two OSPI grants to support student learning recovery and will allow us to pilot different program approaches that we believe will improve

support for some groups of students. The grants include support for the last quarter of 2021-22 and all of the 2022-23 school year.

**Reimagine Education Project Grant:**

In Collaboration with The Benji Project, this pilot will offer social-emotional and academic support for high school students with one or more risk factors for not graduating on time. The program includes a Living and Being Well (LABWell) high school course that implements the Mindfulness and Self-Compassion curriculum facilitated by Benji Project instructors and integrates support from a certificated staff member for academic success.

**Accelerating Unfinished Learning Grant:**

This grant provides support for math and reading intervention for students in grade K-12. The focus is on recovery of learning loss due to COVID-19.

**Other steps taken during the 2021-22 school year:**

- Hired a dedicated ALE Principal.
- Improved student records management, including hiring a dedicated OCEAN K-12 secretary.
- Implemented ALE-specific professional learning on Wednesdays including sessions on Written Student Learning Plans, Equity, and ALE Program Development.
- Developed strategies for ALE teacher retention through administrative support and coaching.
- Developed a written staff handbook.
- Improved access to district-adopted curriculum.
- Adopted a math curriculum better suited for the OCEAN K-12 Family Partnership learning model.
- Reviewed the Online Program curriculum.
- Began an inventory of district-provided curriculum and funded materials for OCEAN K-12 Family Partnership.
- Improved access to up-to-date curriculum and materials in all class areas.
- Reviewed student access to ELL and SPED services.
- Developed a Student Handbook for board approval.
- Developed a written district procedure for transferring students between schools in the district.
- Developed written district procedures for shared FTE amongst schools.
- Collaborated with Blue Heron to provide science lab access for 2022-23 school year.
- Developed a communication strategy for outreach to new families.
- Established clear program expectations and application process.

**Additional work for the future:**

- Engage in an ongoing examination of programmatic design and delivery including the balance between independent and in-school learning time.
- Develop a program model or implement solutions for high school students who need additional support for academic and social-emotional success.

- Explore options for 18-21 year olds who have not completed a high school diploma.
- Continue to review student SPED and ELL services access.
- Continue development of MTSS and strong intervention systems in OCEAN K-12.
- Examine a tri-district collaboration/approach to ALE including Open Doors.
- Finalize and publish district curriculum and materials available for OCEAN K-12 Family Partnership.
- Continue to improve support for the high school and beyond plan and graduation pathway options.
- Continue communication and collaboration with families and the community about district support and resources for OCEAN K-12.
- Create a system for tracking OCEAN students' success over time, including graduation rate.