



Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School is Building a Small School Community One Child at a Time



SNACS

Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School

www.snacs.org • 13880 Stead Blvd. | Reno, Nevada 89506

Special Promotional Supplement
Photography by Stuart Murtland and Jeni Wilke

A Clapping Hand Is a Helping Hand

By Victor Schoenfeldt

For every negative comment made, it takes 12 positive comments to rebuild a child's self-esteem. This is why SNACS uses a four-tiered approach to positive reinforcement. "The ability to create a positive learning environment for students is extremely important," says Kimberly Regan, executive director.

The tiered system allows students to be recognized for positive behavior individually, in groups, as a class and as a school. Individually, teachers recognize students for social citizenship, academic success and the completion of goals. The lower grades track their progress with a rocket-star chart. All students begin the day on the color green for a fresh start; student behavior drives the movement of the rocket. When the direction is downward on the chart, teachers look for ways to reinforce the positive to allow a student to move up as quickly as possible, thereby promoting success and a positive learning experience. "With this type of positive system, there is no need for negative comments, because when children are being rewarded, they want to continue to be rewarded," Regan says.

Students also work in teams during ability-grouping and can earn positive rewards for staying on task, coopera-



tion, collaboration and excelling as a group. Groups earn points for rewards on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. This is a great way for teachers to tie in different math skills, such as counting by 5 or by 10, allowing students to add even more points for their efforts.

As an entire class, students can earn rewards from their teachers by demonstrating the ability to work productively. For example, if the teacher asks the class to line up for

recess quietly, and they follow this direction, they can earn the letter "B." This letter is applied to the word "basketball." When the class earns all of the letters for basketball, they are allowed to play the game as an added treat during their physical education time. Whole-school rewards include those for classes reaching their reading goals. Incentives can include an extra school dance or even requesting that their teachers kiss a pig!

Regan says this kind of reward system not only works, but motivates everyone about learning. "Nobody who gets into this business enjoys having to discipline children," she says. "At SNACS we've found a way to change behavior without taking away the excitement that surrounds learning and their school spirit."

Let's Get Personal: Individualized education works

By Victor Schoenfeldt

To help each of its students reach their highest potential, SNACS' teachers complete a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) for each student, promoting individualized student learning based on data from specific reading, language arts and mathematics assessments. Student progress is tracked daily, weekly and monthly with a group-teaching model called "circle, center and seat." This model places students in groups within the regular classroom based on their reading, language art and mathematic abilities. Within the "circle," students receive instruction from the teacher; in the "center," students work together performing a hands-on activity to reinforce the skill; in the "seat," students practice mastering the skill on their own. At the end of each quarter, each student reassessed.



The Cutting Edge: Bringing high tech opportunities to students

By Jessica Pacheco

SMART Board technology, available in the 5th through 8th grade math classroom and math lab, is just another way to bring pioneering knowledge to students. The SMART Board is an interactive whiteboard with a touch screen for Internet-based learning, DVD viewing, presentations and on-line classroom interactions. The math teacher has the capability to record daily lessons and post them on the SNACS website for students during homework time. The board will also be used for professional teacher development and meetings.

The website, www.snacs.org, is undergoing a complete makeover. The new website will include not only broadbased information, but also interactive online classrooms for parents, staff and students; teacher and student Web pages; resources; videocasts of lessons and events; and link to Edline (an online connection to the school) and other valuable websites.

After-school math lab is an additional resource

The Math Lab, also equipped with a SMART Board, will assist students by giving them access to interactive technology and online learning communities. This supportive laboratory was designed to assist those students needing additional math instruction for current lessons, tutoring or assessment, and for enhancing or advancing their performance levels.

All SNACS students will be permitted to use the Math Lab. There will be designated times for tutoring and homework assistance and for those students not meeting the standard on the state-mandated Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs)



during before- and after-school sessions. Students needing additional support for CRTs will be provided instruction on specific standard-based skills, problem solving, process and applications and test-taking strategies, based on specific CRT content standards.

The goal of the Math Lab is to instill a love of mathematics into the school community. SNACS will provide support for the Math Lab and host school-wide events, such as the Math Game Night, where students create mathematical games and families come to play. This fun-filled event brings families into the world of learning through a fun and interactive forum.





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Camp-outs Teach Students About the Real World

By Victor Schoenfeldt

Tents, coolers full of food, and firewood don't sound like your typical classroom experience, but with SNACS' expeditionary learning, students get the chance to get out of the classroom and into the real world with outdoor labs – otherwise known as school camp-outs. Teachers instruct and engage students in classroom activities on habitats, environmental science, art, culture, history, astronomy and leadership skills. The expeditions allow students to display their knowledge where all of their learning can be put to the test and experienced, not behind desk, but in a real world context.

Students participate in canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and flower, fauna, and tree identification. They also observe animals, hike, bike, swim, learn from ranger and orienteering activities and climb rocks. SNACS' campers don't stop there by any means. They bring with them fiction books, field notes, notepads, journals, pens, cameras and art supplies.

Students do participate in "normal" camping activities, but experiencing what they have learned in the classroom is the main focus. The SNACS outdoor labs, depending on the trip, can be for a given grade level(s), or for the entire school community.

At night, when others may think it's time for sleep, students have the chance to experience orienteering, star and moon gazing, constellation identification and the changing cycles of the solar system. And, of course, there are ghost stories to tell, songs to sing and talent shows to put on.

The outdoor labs have brought the SNACS community to various terrains throughout Nevada and California, including such places as Mt. Lassen, Davis Creek, Washoe Lake, Boca and Stampede Reservoirs, Mammoth Mountain, Fort Churchill, Fallen Leaf Lake, Point Reyes and Yosemite National Park.



Students Discover Themselves Through Unique Programs

By Kimberly Regan

SNACS, a charter school with a twist on teaching, uses the design principles of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (a K-12 school design rooted in the philosophy of the Outward Bound wilderness program) to take children out of the classroom and into the real world. The principles, drawn from Outward Bound founder, Kurt Hahn, serve to shape school culture and provide a foundation for the purpose of SNACS. According to SNACS, each student experiences a unique intellectual and personal experience throughout this process that stimulates self growth and discovery. SNACS accomplishes this through planning, designing and, in higher grade levels, implementing expeditions to places such as Washington, D.C., New York City, Tampa, the Everglades and Orlando.

ELOB design principles, SNACS-style:

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Learning occurs when students are engaged in meaningful activities that require their entire selves. SNACS educators help students overcome their fears and discover their full potential. ELOB allows students to participate in expeditions that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline and significant achievement.

2. ENHANCING NATURAL CURIOSITY

Teachers design learning experiences where children can investigate, experiment and pursue a hands-on exploration that enhances what they have learned.

3. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING

Learning is a personal process of discovery and a social activity. Everyone learns from working individually and in groups. The SNACS culture encourages everyone to become responsible for directing their own personal and collective learning.

4. EMPATHY AND CARING

Learning is fostered in communities where there is mutual respect between adults and students. Learning groups are small, with a caring adult looking after student progress and acting as an advocate for the children. Older students mentor younger ones, making students feel physically and emotionally safe.



5. SUCCESS AND FAILURE

All students need to be successful in order to build confidence, gain the capacity to take risks and meet increasingly difficult challenges. Students must also learn from their failures, persevere when things are hard and learn to turn disabilities into opportunities. Every instance of misbehavior or failing to meet mastery is an opportunity to learn the appropriate behavior or skill.

6. COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

Individualized and group learning are integrated so that the value of friendship, trust and personal growth is clear. Students are encouraged to compete not against each other, but toward their own personal best, with rigorous standards of excellence.

7. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Both diversity and inclusion increase the richness of ideas, creative power, problem-solving ability and respect for others. SNACS students investigate and value their different histories as well as those of other communities and cultures.

8. THE NATURAL WORLD

The natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches the importance of recurring cycles, cause and effect. Outdoor lab experiences are crucial to SNACS' philosophy. Students learn to become stewards of the earth and of future generations.

9. SOLITUDE AND REFLECTION

Students and teachers need time alone to explore their own thoughts, make their own connections and create their own ideas. They also need time to exchange their reflections with other students and with adults.

10. SERVICE AND COMPASSION

We are a crew, not passengers. Students and teachers are strengthened by acts of consequential service to others. One of the ELOB primary functions, by design is to equip students with the attitudes and skills from which to learn.



More information is available by visiting www.ELOB.org or www.snacs.org.

Building a Small School Community One Child at a Time

By Elizabeth Hogue

**An interview with Kimberly Regan,
executive director**

When SNACS was granted a charter in April, 1999 by the Washoe County School District, it was the first elementary/middle charter school serving grades K-8 in Nevada, and it had only seven students. Today, with 250 students (including those in preschool), SNACS is a community all its own with excited teachers, involved parents and a unique style of teaching that's fun for the whole family.

Q. Why do families choose to enroll their children at SNACS?

A. Many parents want to participate more in their children's education and feel we offer that opportunity. Others notice their child isn't successful enough in a traditional school setting and look to us as an alternative. Some families join because they love our personalized learning and instructional model, outdoor labs and family camp-outs. Many parents like knowing they can have their child attend SNACS from preschool through eighth grade. But most of all, I think parents choose SNACS simply because they love our small school community.

Q. Do your children attend SNACS?

A. Yes, my three older children have all attended and graduated from SNACS, with one of them now in middle school and two in high school. I also have two children enrolled in the preschool and I, like many parents, absolutely love it! It's a place we call home.

Q. How are families involved at SNACS?

A. Our family volunteerism program asks parents to donate 10 hours of their time per month toward the school's success, but we try to tailor hours toward parents' interests and expertise. For example, we have several families who own small businesses and donate time toward the school during big events when we need their business services. Other families are experts in a given field and put on presentations for our students, volunteer in the classrooms or during camp-outs.

Q. SNACS educators go camping with families?

A. Yes. Our Outdoor Lab Coordinator, Maxine Weiss, has taken students to places such as Mt. Lassen, Davis Creek, Washoe Lake, Boca and Stampede Reservoirs, Mammoth, Fort Churchill, Fallen Leaf Lake, Point Reyes and Yosemite National Park. Unlike traditional camping, families participate in educational activities from the early morning hours until well after dark. We venture on hikes, biking, boating, fishing, rock climbing, habitat searching, orienteering and on ranger programs.



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Q. What makes SNACS successful?

A. Students have an opportunity to meet their goals and establish new goals, with constant documentation for success four times per year. This helps students take an active role in their education, in that they choose to be successful. Everyone working at the school – from administration to teachers, assistants and support staff – is dedicated to helping children succeed. When everyone is committed to education, children succeed. This is evidenced by the fact that we have made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) every year since the No Child Left Behind act was implemented.

“When everyone is committed to education, children succeed.”

Q. What do you find rewarding about SNACS?

A. I love being a part of a great, small school community, making a difference in education. We really get to know families and extended families through all of the activities we do, as well as our parent volunteerism program. I love to work with teachers and assistants excited about teaching. It’s fun to find out what motivates students to learn and help them succeed. Many students who graduate from SNACS come back and visit us and share their stories about how SNACS has helped them. Although I feel old seeing many of those students who first started with us and are now college graduates, some starting their own families, it’s great to see how well they’re all doing.



Q. How did SNACS get its start?

A. When school first started, we didn’t have any permanent buildings of our own and rented two churches, holding K-3 in one building and grades 4-7 in a building approximately 5 miles away. Teachers taught out of backpacks each day, as we had to carry our teaching materials in and out every day. Several classes were held in the church sanctuary, which meant that on Sunday nights, all staff would report to set up classrooms and take them down again on Friday after school. There was even one week where the lease on the middle school building had ended and the permanent building was not ready yet. The staff planned daily trips into the community and participated in events such as rope climbing at Sky Tavern and rock climbing at Rock Sport. This lasted through Thanksgiving, when we were able to move the students to our current location.

For school tours and information call (775) 677-4500 or visit www.snacs.org.

Students Become Writers, Illustrators...Publishers

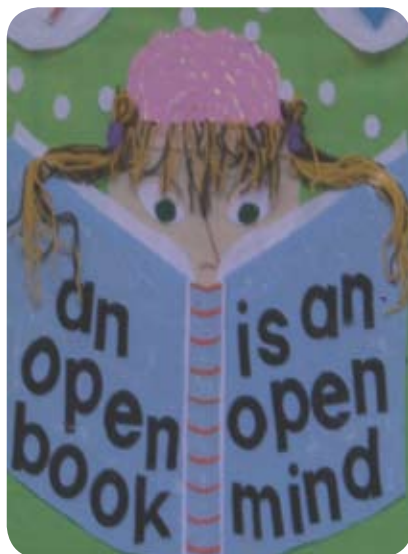
By Kimberly Regan

From preschool to eighth grade, every SNACS student is allowed to be a publisher. Under the direction of English teacher, Kamra Matter, students create their own stories and fully engage in the writing process. The world of writing books leaves an open-ended opportunity for creativity as students are allowed to write and illustrate picture books, longer fiction works, nonfiction, poetry anthologies, recipe books and even political position pieces. Students are responsible for writing, editing, designing and illustrating their own work.

The event culminates at Barnes & Noble, where SNACS authors host a signing event annually. Each student enjoys the official unveiling of his or her publication and signs the first copy

of their book. They decide the theme of the event and participate in setting it up, providing additional entertainment and making sure the day is about celebrating authors, books, reading and writing. The book signing lasts all day so that each student has an individual time slot in which to autograph books.

Authors have been recognized in national book competitions, featured on local radio stations and in the *Reno Gazette Journal*. Students' books, once published, are in a SNACS Caldecott and Newbery Medal competition; winners are announced during the authors' signing event. Students who publish books become known within the community as writers, illustrators, authors and total success stories, all within their own time.



When History Comes To Life

By Kimberly Regan

Pan for gold and experience a rush all your own. Hear Princess Persephone declare her presence to King Zeus and be captured by the Trojans. Paint a masterpiece like Michelangelo, or taste food from ancient China. It's never too late to explore new cultures and discover a new understanding of the world around you.

At SNACS, history comes alive as teachers integrate the study of classical literature, world history, geography and the arts into the social studies program with living history days. Artifacts from each new culture are researched, gathered and created by students and teachers in grades

5-8 each month, while students in grades preschool through fourth transform into the civilians of each featured period as they engage in the activities and watch performances created by the middle school team.

This year, SNACS social studies teacher Kelly Lomelin and Kimberly Regan, executive director, plan to send samples of those artifacts throughout the community as part of a traveling museum.

Community sponsors interested in housing or funding the traveling museum should contact SNACS.



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Learning Through Everyday Play

By Kimberly Regan

Why play? Young children learn and develop their understanding of the world through play. It's crucial to the development of the whole child. Young children learn and develop a multitude of skills in the areas of literacy and language development; mathematical, logical and scientific thinking; social and emotional relationships; music; art; theatrical arts; the natural world; health; and physical fitness – simply by playing.

SNACS' Preschool curriculum is designed to provide developmentally appropriate activities in which young children learn. Using the Reggio Emilia Approach, children explore their "hundred languages" through making choices. As a result, they learn necessary academic skills as well as independence and social skills.

Children rotate through five classrooms, one each day of the week, to provide them with the opportunity to explore different centers in each room. The individual centers are designed to provide children with specific learning skills through play experiences. For example, in the housekeeping center, young children learn social and language skills while gaining independence. They also are introduced to mathematical-logical skills when they sort and categorize dishes, food, dolls and other materials found in the housekeeping center. These

abilities provide a foundation for success that will last throughout their educational careers.

Teachers are trained in the importance of each center and the expertise in various categories children are gaining. They are trained how

and when to engage with children in play to enhance their learning skills while asking questions to promote higher-order thinking, prompting them to make connections between what they have already learned and what they are experiencing.

The SNACS Preschool Team works together, with parents as our partners, to provide young children with a positive school experience in a warm and supportive environment that incorporates the whole child. Our goals for all children attending SNACS Preschool is to foster and develop a love of learning, an awareness and knowledge of the world in which they live and to help them to make decisions about their relationships in the world.



SNACS preschool undergoing accreditation through NAEYC

The SNACS Preschool Team is working toward accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which is the gold seal of approval for preschools across the nation. NAEYC is an organization that promotes excellence in early childhood education programs. It serves as a resource to early childhood educators and advocates in the field of early childhood. The SNACS Preschool Team is already trained in the NAEYC program standards, under the guidance of Executive Director Kimberly Regan, who holds a master's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Making a Difference in Early Childhood

By Kimberly Regan

SNACS' Preschool recently received the "Together We Can Make a Difference Award" for their Early Childhood Center's dedication to excellence. The Preschool team was acknowledged by the Reno Association for the Education of Young Children for working together and partnering with parents, to make a difference in the lives of young children.



Two of those teachers, Brenda Gregory and Teri Poirer, were also nominated individually for the "Making a Difference Award" for their efforts to make a difference in everyone they come in contact with.

Miss Brenda, as the children call her, works with infants and toddlers. Parents describe her as a wonderful person, loved by their children. The

small children practically jump out of their parents' arms when they see Miss Brenda. When asked why she likes working with infants and toddlers, she says, "Well, I just love them. They're fun. They each have their own little personalities and I get to participate and watch them develop. They're just so cute."



Miss Teri works with 4- and 5-year-old children. Parents say she creates a fun-filled learning environment where children cannot wait to get to school everyday to learn something new. "We take learning as serious business. We don't have time to mess around. We have so much to learn!" Miss Teri says. "As much as I establish learning activities and teach the children, they teach me about life and love of learning. So every day brings excitement and new experiences."

SNACS plans for for infant & toddler program

By Kimberly Regan

Because of the great need for developmentally appropriate infant and toddler programs within our community, SNACS Preschool recently began the application process to include 1- and 2-year-old children.

Plans for the new program are underway and include a room with many small age appropriate centers. At each center, the children will be encouraged to engage in play activities that offer a multitude of skills in the areas of literacy and language development; mathematical, logical and scientific thinking; social and emotional relationships; music; art; theatrical arts; the natural world and health and physical fitness.

The program will be a collaboration of the executive director and teachers Brenda Gregory and Pamela Grupe. They will follow the same guidelines as the "Creative Curriculum" used with the older groups. Previously, SNACS preschool was open only to children 2 and up, who were potty-trained. The new addition will allow for continuity in the curriculum at every age level.

Staff members are receiving calls about the new classroom and have started a waiting list due to the overwhelming response. The new addition is scheduled to open this month. Interested families should contact SNACS for information on how to be added to the list.



SNACS PRESCHOOL SEEKING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS & ASSISTANTS

- Must love working with and teaching young children
- Team player
- Flexible Hours
- Knowledge of NAEYC
- Prefer degree in Early Childhood Education or enrolled in degree program (proof required)
- Must participate in NAEYC Accreditation Process

You will be required to obtain all required childcare paperwork including Sheriff's Card, Fingerprint Cards, Negative TB Test, CPR & First Aid. Within the first 30 days, you'll need to complete all social service required courses and register with the Nevada Registry for Early Childhood.

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