



The OWS Story...

Open Window School was founded in 1983 by Mary Ann Simpson and Jean Booker to serve gifted preschoolers. In 1985, it was incorporated and expanded to include an elementary program. Initially, OWS was housed in a church basement in Bellevue. After several years, it relocated to the former Lake Heights Elementary School in Newport Hills, Bellevue, where it shared the rented facility with the Lake Heights YMCA.

Since its inception, OWS has been dedicated to nurturing children's social and emotional needs, intellectual curiosity, creativity and capacity for critical thinking along with advanced academic skills. At the heart of its philosophy is the conviction that its students are "children first, gifted second."

Over the years, the school experienced challenges and successes. Administrative turnover between 1992 and 1996 was a cause for concern; however the school was sustained by excellent teachers, a robust educational program, and clear mission. Jean Augustine, the interim Head of School in 1996-1997, provided strong leadership and, in 1997, current Head of School, Wilder Dominick, arrived. In succeeding years, the school devoted great effort to strengthening its curriculum, finances, business policies and governance practices, and, in 2002, was pleased to gain full re-accreditation from the Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools.

The stability, success and increasing demand for the OWS program emphasized the need to build a permanent home, and, in 1998, the school purchased 6.7 acres on Cougar Mountain and began to work with the Miller Hull Partnership to design a new campus. Due to neighborhood opposition, campus construction was delayed several years; however, in September 2004, Open Window School moved to its new campus and immediately expanded enrollment from 163 to 248 students, Pre-Kindergarten through 5th Grade.

Once established in the new campus, the school began realizing another strategic initiative, creation of a middle school to complement the elementary program. To best serve its mission of serving gifted students, the Board and Administration concluded that the ideal configuration of the school was a Kindergarten through 8th Grade program. Consequently, it eliminated the Pre-Kindergarten program in 2008-2009, and began managing to an ultimate model of 2 sections per grade level, Kindergarten through 8th Grade, with a maximum enrollment cap of 315 students as required by the City of Bellevue.

In Fall 2007, Open Window's middle school division, Vista Academy, welcomed its first sixth grade class of 11 students. In three years, Vista has expanded dramatically. By 2011-2012, Vista expects 90 students, Grades 5-8, and in the near future we expect a balance of enrollment between the elementary and middle school divisions. The success of Open Window School and Vista Academy has necessitated facility expansion, and the school has been in the midst of a capital campaign since fall 2009. In addition to new Vista classrooms, plans include development of the playfield and minor remodeling of Robinson Hall. Construction will begin April 2011 and is scheduled to be complete by September 2011.

Currently, the school enrolls 308 students, Kindergarten through 8th Grade. 20% of the students receive financial aid, and approximately 40% of its students are of diverse backgrounds. OWS has grown and changed significantly over the years; however, it remains true to its original mission. It is known especially for:

- Understanding of complex, intellectually gifted children
- Academic program differentiation
- A nurturing and supportive environment
- Partnership with families

