

Stephen S. Wise Elementary School: A Very “Wise” Choice

Description



A compelling corner of the campus

A sunny L.A. morning last week found me visiting Stephen S. Wise Elementary School for the first time. Headed by principal Tami Weiser, this Jewish Day School is tucked away on a picturesque campus nestled in the trees, accessible from a small private drive off Mulholland in Bel Air.

Tami welcomed me graciously into her office where Beth Behar, the admissions director, joined us. Our conversation flowed from general private school observations to the popular school Tami oversees. Within a few minutes, I quickly realized this is a school with a lot to offer!

Tami is an educator with many years of experience who is constantly seeking the best scholarly ideas in education to implement at the school. She is vibrant and likable. Her mood sparkles as she proudly talks about two of their signature programs: The Gifted Education Partnership with USC and The Studio Lab.



Peak viewing!

Tradition With A Twist

When I asked how she would describe the school's educational philosophy, she responded, "This is a traditional school within a Reform congregation." Speaking with the confidence we all want from the principal responsible for educating our kids, Tami was quick to point out there is a lot of experiential education taking place, making the school a hybrid of new and traditional ideas. She was also effusive in her praise for the staff and board, who help make these ideas come to life.



One of three kindergarten classes

Walking around the sprawling campus with its low slung buildings that are punctuated by open spaces, Beth, one of the friendliest and most knowledgeable directors I've met, was happy to showcase the school. From the kindergarten classroom to the kindergarten play yard, kids dressed in their blue uniforms, were happily buzzing with activity.



The kindergarten playground

Stopping by a math class, we saw kids gathered on a rug as the young, energetic teacher discussed a math concept. They were focused and engaged. Science class students were finishing up a project.



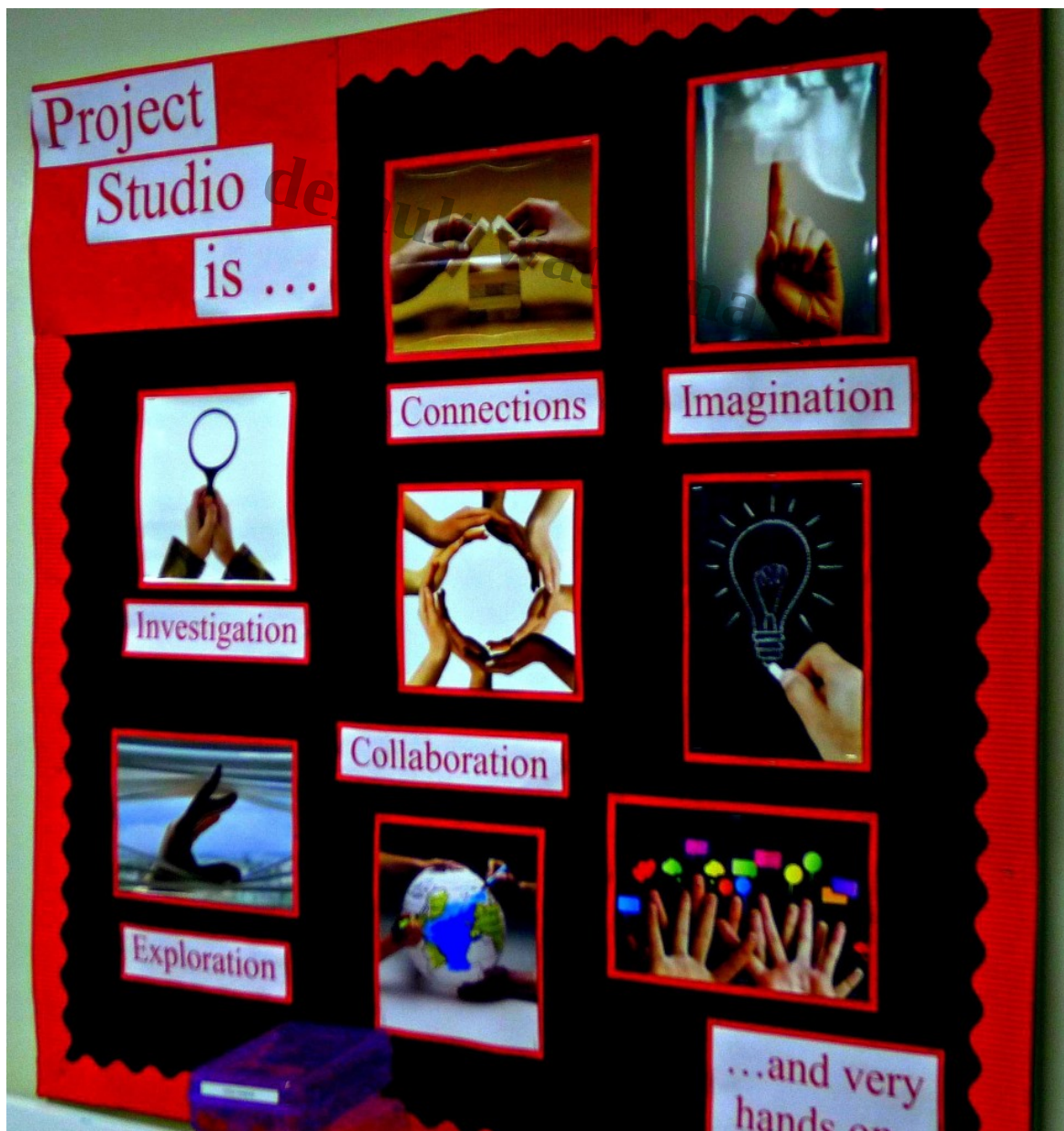
Earthworks: The school garden

Gifted Education, Re-interpreted

One of the school's signature programs is its unique partnership with USC Professor Dr. Sandra Kaplan, a gifted education expert. Putting their combined talents to work, the elementary school and the University have created implemented a program that ensures "every student is exposed to a gifted curriculum and high level learning experiences." This collaboration between the principal and the professor is an integral part of the school's curriculum for every kid, not only those who are gifted.

Weiser shares, "It is our belief that children are gifted in different ways; be it intellectually, creatively, artistically or athletically. Stephen S. Wise Temple Elementary School recognizes and cultivates these gifts." *

According to the school's [website](#), "Our program provides a variety of teaching and learning strategies by grouping children according to their achievement in reading, math and Hebrew; and in homogeneous groups in writing, social studies and specialist areas of technology, science, music and art. These learning experiences provide children with the opportunity to build critical, problem solving and research skills, be creative and innovative, and exhibit leadership and responsibility.



Project Studio: Innovation happens here

Project Studio

Entering Project Studio, teacher Jason Meth was busy setting up maps on the floor of a large open classroom before his students arrived. He explained that Project Studio is a space for kids to explore, solve problems and learn in a space without the constraints of tables, chairs and desks. This encourages connection and collaboration between students and between teacher and students. A smart board and other technologies are at the center of this inquiry-based program.

It is important to note that Jewish education is a major theme at Stephen S. Wise. Jewish ethical and spiritual values, along with Hebrew as a second language are taught.



How cool! Fun and safety in the pool

There are 350 students in the school, with two teachers per grade. Importantly, the school disburses \$800,000 annually in financial aid (thatâ€™s a lot of money that is most welcome in these uncertain economic times).

Where Graduates Go

Most of the schoolâ€™s graduates attend Milken Middle School and Milken Community High School of Stephen S. Wise Temple, but of those who did not, all 21 were accepted at secondary schools of their choice. Graduates attend Milken,

Harvard-Westlake, Brentwood, Buckley, Windward, Campbell Hall, Oakwood and Archer.

My experience touring Stephen S. Wise Elementary School provided me with an up close look at a remarkable school.

For more information, visit, www.wiseelementary.org

* Source: Stephen S. Wise Elementary website

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