



Ile Omode

A Proposal for a Healthy Learning Environment
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Beauty. It is not superficial or inconsequential, rather it is the quality that surrounds a person and gives animation to their character - determining in fact how they move through their environment and how they interact with others, even defining the extent of their reach. Our school's external environment has never been described as beautiful.

Since 1986, when Ile Omode was founded, we've sought to provide a high quality education to deserving and underserved youth from preschool to 8th grade. Over the last decade the school's program has soared. The enrollment has tripled, the school's graduates boast a 100% acceptance rate to private high schools while earning thousands of dollars in scholarship monies for children who otherwise could not afford area private schools, and the school's summer camps serve hundreds with camps as diverse as robotics and West African dance.

Unfortunately the school has not been able to affect a substantial change in our neighborhood nor the physical space we occupy. Inside the classrooms students are inspired - meeting high expectations while discovering their passion for learning. Outside the classroom however, their environment is far dimmer.

Ile Omode lies in east Oakland near the intersection of 90th and International Boulevard. The area is a permanent residence for an entrenched homeless population and drug sells at the immediate corners merely fuels the areas decay. The school lies directly across from an industrial building which occupies the entire block, but not a place in the neighborhood, and our block has thus become a dump site for abandoned cars, broken furniture, and other household refuse that litters our school's block nearly every day. Monday mornings are spent sweeping up drug paraphernalia, condoms, and discarded bottles of alcohol.

The neighborhood is not just unsightly, but poses safety risk for Ile Omode's children. The poorly built fence protecting our children from speeding cars is falling apart after a reckless driver crashed through the fence, and continued driving, while the neighbor's violent dogs continue to ram their head into the fence separating the school's playground. Makeshift repairs are merely delaying the inevitable, and while the children play on the school's small grounds we pray that the dilapidated wooden fences are sufficient to keep the dogs at bay for one more day.

Within our playground our children don't have a healthy playing environment. While we have a small community garden, there is so much more our children should have to provide better health. There is no outdoor water fountain, minimal shade protection, virtually no place to even sit, and while we want to inspire the neighborhood, we know that it is not healthy for children to look through the fence and see fights, domestic violence, drug abuse, and garbage. This is neither healthy for their self development nor inspiring to uplifting their spirits, and it doesn't facilitate a change in the neighborhood.

We want a green environment; a school with more green space, that encourages recycling inside and outside our walls, reduces the plastic footprint in our ecosystem, and harnesses solar power.

We know that where poverty and despair meet the result is rarely good, but Ile Omode has endeavored to be the oasis in the desert. When we conduct drum circles outside each week, the call of the djembe resonating from our playgrounds causes residents to stop and their smiles tell a story. When our youth engage in community cleanup, members of the community stop and participate. The school's presence does bring joy to local residents, but we want more. We want to not only provide a safe and healthy environment for the youth we serve, but to be a catalyst for changing the surrounding community, and promoting a sense of hope in others.

Ile Omode is asking for support to provide the following:

1. Replace a cyclone fence and install crash prevention posts
2. Replace a wooden fence with a concrete base wooden fence with carved seating
3. Provide outdoor seating on the playground
4. Install water fountains on the playground
5. Install water recycling stations in the hallways
6. Add greenery to the school's grounds
7. Install a video monitoring system to identify and report those who are dumping on the block
8. Contract with local artists to develop a series of inspiration murals
9. Create a raised deck for drumming and an outdoor classroom
10. Provide recycling bins both inside and outside
11. Develop a plan for moving towards providing solar power

We know we have a responsibility to offer our youth a healthy and inspiring environment in which to learn, and we continue to do as much as we can with limited resources. We're seeking outside support to help us transform our school and neighborhood to increase safety for our youth, provide a healthier learning environment, encourage recycling and environmental stewardship, and begin to change the character and nature of the neighborhood we share.