

A. STANDARDS-BASED STUDENT LEARNING:

1. All students participate in a rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards-based curriculum that supports the achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results; through standards-based learning (what is taught and how it is taught), the expected schoolwide learning results are accomplished.

ESLRs Addressed: Effective Communicators, Technologically Skilled Individuals, Historically-Aware Learners, Mathematical Thinkers, Scientific Thinkers, Lifelong Learners.

Findings

As we (Connecting Waters Charter School) engage in the process of evaluating “to what extent all students participate in a rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards-based curriculum that supports the achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results,” we look to the “cornerstone” of our school philosophy, that being, “parental involvement, providing ample learning programs and opportunities for all learning styles, and supporting an individualized approach to learning” (<http://www.connectingwaters.org/SARC2004.htm>). Our program involves the following principles: parent choice, performance-based assessment, recognition that schooling is one aspect of an education. By adhering to these principles, Connecting Waters Charter School faces unique curriculum and instruction challenges. Because we serve the community as a parent choice school, we need to remain flexible in the area of curriculum and instruction. When a parent determines, with the guidance of the certificated teacher (education specialist) assigned to the family, that a child’s educational needs and learning style are supported by appropriate curriculum, teaching styles, and materials, the parent can choose from a variety of options. These include (within budget and other, e.g., nonsectarian, restraints) texts, workbooks and materials from numerous vendors, tutoring services, classes offered by CWCS and by other resources in the community including volunteer programs, ROP, community college and career exploration. At CWCS, schooling is viewed as one aspect of an education; the entire community serves as the school campus and lessons and learning take place beyond the confines of traditional school hours.

The independent study program at CWCS serves students K-12. Each student, along with parent or caregiver who commits to being responsible for the child’s education, and the education specialist assigned to serve the family, signs a contract every semester. Within the contracted partnership, decisions are made as to the degree of direct involvement the parent as primary educator, the education specialist, and the student have in the instruction process. Families choose such a program for a variety of reasons. Because students learn at different rates and have different interests, aptitudes, learning styles, an individualized approach in planning and delivery of instruction in a program such as CWCS often provides students who have struggled or failed in traditional school the opportunity to be successful. Other students may advance rapidly and progress toward higher education earlier than their peers, or pursue job interests outside of school, which they would not be able to do in a traditional classroom setting. ELD and special education students benefit in this program from the one-on-one instruction and from the

high interest curriculum tailored to their language- and/or ability-levels. We are a practical option for single parents and low income independent study students who can meet their education specialists in their homes or at other convenient, mutually agreed upon sites.

Delivery of instruction may occur, depending on the individual student's ability, learning style, and interests, in any of the following ways and combinations: classroom lectures (contract programs--small group instruction), tutoring (in-home or agency), one-on-one instruction in the home, by computer (Internet, CD Rom), video/film, listening tapes, textbook-workbook reading and response. Education specialists spend time with each family on a monthly basis, a bi-weekly basis, or a weekly basis, depending on the contract and the education plan. If the family chooses the AESS (Additional Education Specialist Services) plan, the ES will take a more active role in the delivery of instruction and evaluation of learning, meeting with the student up to four times a month.

For CWCS, the process of becoming a standards' based school began two years ago with discussions that raised questions, the main one being: how, with all the choices offered parents, with options to choose state adopted curricula or to select alternative materials and delivery systems, would parents be better able to assess and select learning options that would lead (in a in a planned manner as laid out by the California *Frameworks* and the State Standards) to students' becoming knowledgeable and contributing members of society?

To Date, the following steps have been taken toward answering that question: Edusoft, a powerful on-line software program for generating STAR and CAHSEE type questions, was chosen as a tool for both parents and ESs to use (see below); evaluation rubrics were designed for math and language arts portfolio samples; workshops demonstrating how to evaluate curriculum with grade-level standards in mind were held for parents and ESs. In addition, a list of workbooks and texts from K through 12 (from state-adopted, traditional nonsectarian home-school, high interest, and challenge curricula) were generated by parents and ESs for those families wishing to have recommendations. We purchased standards-based curricula and made these resources available for parent check-out from our centers. Our A-G course recommendations are available on our website as are lists of curriculum titles and vendors offering materials which support the state standards and our ESLRs <http://www.ieminc.org/handbook/curriculum/index.htm>. Because ESs serve parents of students at many grade levels, knowledge of each state standard per each grade level will be developmental. Giving the parents the benchmarks and assisting them in evaluating their curriculum and instruction will be on-going.

During the 2003-2004 school year parents and ESs gave Edusoft (<http://www.edusoft.com/login.jsp>) a trial run. Students who answered test questions generated by the program reported that, by having practiced the multiple choice format with questions similar to those they would encounter in the spring, they felt more comfortable during CAT6/STAR testing.

Pursuing a plan for all students to have access to Edusoft standards-based questions through the quarterly release of benchmark exams in math and language arts, ESs, the curriculum director of the Waterford School District, the charter school's director, and interested parents met to evaluate the STAR test benchmark objectives which Waterford School District teachers had selected in a developmental pattern by thirds. The CWCS team restructured the objectives into quarters (<http://www.ieminc.org/handbook/test/cwbenchass/index.htm>), then selected the corresponding state standards-based Edusoft questions so that parents would have the questions available quarterly. The grade-level questions in math and language arts can be printed from the Edusoft website on a home computer or brought as hardcopy to homes by the ESs.

In addition to giving students test practice, having developmental levels of the test available quarterly provides a way for parents to assess the curricula and presentation (the what and the how) they are using, checking which concepts have been mastered and which have not. Evaluating the curriculum with the assistance of the ES, the parent can then obtain any missing standards components in the student's education (<http://www.connectingwaters.org/Assessment/Systest804.htm>).

The use of Edusoft is not limited to the quarterly standards-based benchmark assessment package, however. Any parent or ES can generate standards-based questions from the data base on particular content (in HSEE math and English, in language arts, science, history, elementary or high school level math, English language development, dance, music, theater, visual arts) or even type in original or text/workbook questions, and select whether the test should be in multiple choice, short answer, or long answer format. Some parents enjoy the flexibility of this tool and apply it to much of their children's curriculum.

Providing information for stakeholders and for any interested parties about this and other tools, activities, and materials is the purpose of the Connecting Waters Charter School website at <http://www.connectingwaters.org>. The website contains lists of curricula; links to vendors from which we purchase curricula, support materials and services; links to education-related websites including the State Standards website; the Monthly Newsletters; the ES and the Parent Council meeting agendas; the accreditation documents, leadership team, focus groups, and home groups meeting agendas; lists of current classes offered by the school; lists of school-sponsored events and how to get involved; the ES and Parent Handbooks; Graduation Information, Growth Area/Subject Guide (which substantively corresponds to our ESLRs), High School Grade Placement Policy, Life Skills Electives Planning guide, information on Transcripts, UC/CSU Admissions information and links, Work Permit information, Advanced Placement Exams information, answers to questions about Carnegie Units, about Community College Attendance, Course Information (high school course titles, foreign language requirements, visual and performing arts requirements, algebra requirements, science requirements, A-G/AP general information), Driver's Education, academic competitions. The High School Guidance pages <http://www.connectingwaters.org/Guidance/index.htm> include: a typical high school plan, college admission requirements, career information,

guidance office information with a link to our guidance counselor, Mary Halter, information on scholarships/grants, college entrance exams. The parent handbook answers questions about graduation requirements.

Mary Halter, school counselor serving Stanislaus, Alameda, Calaveras, Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, and Tuolumne counties, began holding workshops in a series that includes "College Basics 101," "UC/CSU information and application," "Senior Night," and "Financial Aid Night." Guidance department focus, according to Ms. Halter, "is to provide students with academic support, career/vocational support, and personal/social support as well as professional development for staff. In order to accomplish these objectives, we have a survey 'Guidance Department Questionnaire' that was circulated to our students through the ESSs, we are communicating to parents through the monthly newsletter, and a letter to all seniors was mailed providing information about upcoming workshops, college fairs, and college entrance exam information." In addition, students and parents are encouraged to call to set up appointments for personal meetings.

Communication for home-based education is effectively handled in person by the education specialists, by email, by telephone, and postal mail. In keeping with the school's interest in technology, emphasis is placed on bringing computers to families that do not have them, getting families connected to the Internet if they are not already using that information source, and communicating regularly by email using the Parent List Serve.

Much of the school's paperwork is handled electronically. K-12 coursework is recorded monthly by the family's education specialist on an electronically generated document called the "learning record." This document, along with portfolio samples, standardized testing results and report cards/ transcripts, provides proof of student learning and progress toward achieving the ESLRs. The Edusoft test results will become an additional proof. Our director hopes that parents will choose to use the scanning equipment at the learning centers to record and track the results of the tests and their children's progress.

At each learning center (currently two, one in Ceres and one in Manteca, plus a section at the office in Waterford), parents can use the scanning machine in addition to checking out texts, workbooks, videos, and CDs, as well as learning games and manipulatives. Parents can, in this way, evaluate materials without commitment or supplement the programs they have in place. With a state grant for library books, CWCS purchased support materials for history and language arts which are available for checkout at the centers. (Learning centers are also used to hold tutoring and small group instruction sessions, special needs testing, ES and parent meetings, workshops, etc.).

Through the WASC process, we found that, for the self-study in the area of curriculum and instruction, we needed to narrow the attention of the focus groups. By evaluating the standardized test results and looking at student work samples, we determined that language arts (ESLR: Effective Communicators) and math (ESLR: Mathematical Thinkers) required our attention this year. We recognized that if we focused on these two

ESLRs, developed assessment rubrics and Edusoft generated tests, and assisted parents in aligning English and math curricula to the state standards in this coming year (2004-2005), we could incorporate other ESLRs in subsequent years.

Areas of Strength:

- § Individualized instruction delivery systems
- § Parental involvement
- § One-on-one instruction
- § Small group instruction
- § Flexible scheduling of instruction
- § Current instructional materials at student's level
- § Parent-school communication
- * The community is the campus
- * School guidance counselor
- *

Growth Areas:

- § Training parents and ESs on state standards and curriculum correlation
- § Integrating benchmark exams with curriculum
- § Refinement of math and writing rubrics
- § Educating parents to use rubrics
- * Developing rubrics in other subjects
- * Guidance counselor visits to all communities
- * Developing and using surveys to evaluate impact of education at CWCS
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Evidence

- § Learning records
- § Student portfolios and work samples
- § CWCS website accreditation information with focus group agenda and meeting notes
- § Governing Council Meeting Notes
- § CWCS website ES and parent handbooks
- § Standardized test results
- § CWCS writing and math rubrics
- § Survey results
- * ESLRs
- * Meeting agenda links
- * ES job description
- * ES credential requirements
- * Student Agreement
- * Math & Writing Rubrics
- * List of A-G courses
- * Sample benchmark exam
- * Edusoft
- *

2. All students have access to the school's entire program and assistance with a personal learning plan to prepare them for the pursuit of their academic, personal and school-to-career goals.

ESLRs Addressed: Effective Communicators, Effective Citizens, Technologically Skilled Individuals, Historically-Aware, Mathematical Thinkers, Scientific Thinkers, Lifelong Learners.

Findings

While answering the question, to what extent do all students have access to the school's entire program and assistance with a personal learning plan to prepare them for the pursuit of their academic, personal and school-to-career goals, we cite the stated mission of CWCS of empowering "a community of parents, students and teachers to create learning opportunities which will develop accountable, responsible, and contributing members of society who are independent, life-long learners." Toward that end and guided by our focus on the ESLRs, the school publishes periodically updated guidelines for the ES-parent-student partnership to follow. Parents have the opportunity in CWCS to design and oversee the course of their child's education, to teach lessons and subjects directly, to choose qualified local community instructors for a wide variety of subjects, and to network with other parents and students. If the parent or older student/independent learner prefers the assistance of tutoring or more guidance from the education specialist, those options are also available (see AESS, Additional Education Specialist Services, plan under A-1).

During the first meeting between the ES and the family, the groundwork is laid for the partnership in learning. At this meeting, the ES interviews the parent/caregiver or older student to ascertain if the program is appropriate (if a younger student has working parents and no other person in the home to be responsible for daily instruction, the program rarely benefits the child). Together with the ES, the parent(s)/caregiver(s) make choices that will help create learning opportunities for the student. These may include choosing home-based instruction, independent study, or a combination of learning formats.

The ES assists the parent in evaluating the learning styles of the student through the interview process, by observation, and perhaps by using a tool such as the Kaleidoscope analysis published by Performance Learning Systems at www.plsweb.com. If the results of prior years' STAR/CAT6, information from the cume file, report cards, IEPs or other plans are available, the ES evaluates these. In addition, the ES gives the new student the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) to gauge the student's general language arts and math knowledge level. Once the level and style of learning are ascertained, the education specialist assists the student and parent to make curriculum decisions. If the choices need to be reevaluated during the school year, the school can readily accommodate the changes within the budget constraints or availability of community resources.

Using the planning documents available on the CWCS website
(Graduation Requirements Menu <http://www.ieminc.org/genericforms/GradReqMenu.pdf>
Graduation Requirements Agreement <http://www.ieminc.org/genericforms/gradagree.pdf>

Suggested High School Completion Plan

<http://www.connectingwaters.org/Guidance/TypHSplan/index.htm>), a schedule for each high school student is developed considering the interests expressed by the student and the seven growth area requirements (corresponding to the ESLRs) which guide decisions. The parent handbook on the website states that “In order to earn a diploma from Connecting Waters Charter School, a student must fulfill requirements in the seven growth areas which, as specified in the charter, constitute an educated person in the 21st century. Each student and his/her parent will select from the menu the means by which the student will demonstrate his/her ability in each growth area. The choices in each area fall into three categories: Carnegie units/credits, CWCS demonstration models, student developed demonstration model.” Although most students choose to do work which earns Carnegie units (usually 5.0 per subject per semester), other options (the demonstrations) are described in the 142-page Charter Graduation Requirements Handbook on the website (<http://www.ieminc.org/genericforms/gradreqhdbk.pdf>). Carnegie units are earned not by text book alone, but also by hours in non-textbook activities (75 hours of learning/practice per semester). Such activities include but are not limited to: P.E., career exploration/volunteer work, developing technology-related projects, exploring potential in performing and living arts.

At the first meeting, and in subsequent learning-record visits, the education specialist discusses the support which the state standards and blueprints offer the parent when selecting the semester’s learning objectives. Because of the networking nature of the school, the family should never think of themselves as attempting this alone without a safety net. The ES is available to answer questions and offer guidance and suggestions, as are parent support personnel including the school counselor and guidance counselor. Parents are invited to attend monthly curriculum training and workshops to gain insight on curricula available from various vendors, on learning and teaching styles, and on the state standard requirements. The parent council discusses, develops/approves short and long term goals, monitors the school’s performance, is involved in the accreditation process, makes suggestions to improve the school. Involving language minority parents and those who work outside the home can be challenging because of language, interest, and time restrictions. Resources are available to all who seek them. ESs continually encourage and provide materials to keep students on track.

Because CWCS recognizes that schooling is but one aspect of education, Some community-based activities recorded in learning records: job shadowing/working: in landscaping, in the medical profession, in auto mechanics, in law enforcement and fire fighting, for paramedics, in veterinary clinic; employed with: TTY tele-communications, pet grooming, heating and air conditioning business, for real estate agent, for optometrist, in restaurant; playing in local bands and symphony orchestra; volunteering for Project R.I.D.E, peer tutoring, volunteering in children’s hospital, volunteering for local Headstart program, assisting in elementary classrooms, helping shut-ins, helping serve at food for homeless, coordinating sound system for community band, designing and running Power Point presentations, performing in drama and dance groups, driving tractor; participating in sports: statewide karate competitions, basketball camp, statewide BMX bicycle competitions, performing in dance competitions and at Disneyland,

acrobatic performances, demonstrations of horsemanship and cutting competitions.. One student was the poster child for United Way; another has served as a docent for a nature center (he plans to be an arachnologist); another toured behind the scenes at the University of California, Berkeley, and spoke with professors and researchers in his fields of interest. Some students enjoy the challenge of Toastmasters.ESs encourage parents and students to consider the community the “schoolhouse.” The flexibility of the program, the fact that learning is not bound by the clock, means that students have been able to pursue a variety of interests (see box).

At CWCS student interest and aptitude vary greatly; our service area in California contains great differences in demographics and in natural and human resources; philosophically, we do not participate in a one-size-fits-all program of education; we have budget and human resource limitations; for these and other reasons, every educational path that each student has followed will be his or her path alone. What is available to one is available to another if that is where the student’s interest lies. Naturally, those who live in the mountains may be more inclined to spend much time skiing in the winter, while those in the valley, for whom transporting themselves to the mountains is not as simple as driving 10 minutes from home, will not participate as often. Community activities, as well as career exploration in volunteer and paid positions are limited by the communities in which students reside, but are not limited, if available, to motivated students who pursue their interests. The junior colleges are valuable educational resources, as are local parks and recreation departments, museums, science camps, etc. The Parent List Serve, as well as independent networking, keeps parents informed of community activities.

Our school has a process for arranging school-sponsored group educational activities as interest and funding support them. Our two sizeable and active learning centers, along with a small one associated with our Waterford office, are located to serve our largest population of students: in Manteca and in Ceres (<http://www.connectingwaters.org/Sites/index.htm>). At these sites, students are tutored in math and writing, take classes in visual and performing arts, in languages, in science.

Our school and guidance counselors, along with our guidance links (<http://www.connectingwaters.org/Guidance/index.htm>), are available to all students and teachers by email, phone, and personal appointments.

ELD and special needs students benefit from independent study at CWCS in a number of ways: individualized curriculum to meet student’s needs, flexibility in learning and teaching styles, real-life context-based learning, one-on-one instruction by parent, by ES, and by tutor. Personal accountability for learning helps students develop a sense of responsibility and independence which will serve them well in the future. Curriculum and instruction can be selected to support learning styles-audio tapes, video and CD Rom delivery, text books and labs, worktext and study guides, hands-on activities, small group instruction with discussion groups. Parents have formed their own “co-ops” where they share responsibility for teaching students content or engaging in projects depending on the parent’s interest and abilities.

Most of our education specialists have teaching backgrounds in the traditional education system; in addition, they are versed in graduation requirements, have knowledge of available school resources, have a network of other ESs upon whom to call for advice and recommendations, have advisors with whom they have established trusting relationships. Most live in the communities they serve and participate in or know of events and community resources, job fairs, local service industries, community classes and junior college resources. As the ES acquaints himself or herself with the student's interests, ideas are shared; students are supported and encouraged in their efforts to reach out to the community in volunteer positions, in adult education classes, in ROP, in junior college classes taken in conjunction with CWCS coursework. ESs are there to applaud when students place job applications, call colleges for information, go on interviews. Occasionally, for the student without role models, the ES will model calls and contact letters. He/she can provide sample resumes, guide students in resume writing and in writing letters of interest, give grooming advice and sample questions which prospective employers may ask.

If a parent/caregiver or older student feels that he or she is not receiving enough support and information by way of the assigned education specialist, he or she may contact the ES Advisor and air those concerns. Families are free to select a new ES depending on availability.

(Include post-graduate survey results)

Areas of Strength:

- § Current curricula
- § Material that supports individual learning styles
- § Emphasis on current technology
- § Learning centers
- § Real-life context-based learning
- § Website and education specialist guidance
- § One-on-one meetings with education specialist
- § Home visits
- § School-parent communication
- * Parent support team
- * Guidance department
- * ESLRS with corresponding growth areas
- *

Growth Areas:

- * Increasing course offerings at current learning centers
- * Providing more local classes in less served counties
- * Finding more ways to engage language minority parents in the process

Evidence:

- § Learning records
- § Student portfolios and work samples

- § CWCS website
- § Parent Council minutes
- § CWCS learning centers and class schedules
- § Student questionnaires
- § Report cards and transcripts
- § ES and parent handbooks
- * Student surveys
- * Sample WRAT test
- * Graduation plan and “grad packet”
- *

3. Upon completion of the high school program, students will be able to meet all the requirements of graduation.

ESLRs Addressed: Effective Communicators, Technologically Skilled, Historically-Aware, Mathematical Thinkers, Scientific Thinkers, Lifelong Learners

Findings

Connecting Waters Charter School students must meet the state requirements for graduation as detailed on the school’s website. “Students and parents together with their education specialist determine long-term goals and fashion a plan, which allows the student to meet those goals. All parties at the beginning of each school year agree upon a curricular plan. This yearly plan may be changed at any time with parent and student approval provided the consequences of the change is understood. The education specialist will provide such information.” -Charter Graduation Requirements Handbook (<http://www.ieminc.org/genericforms/gradreqhdbk.pdf> , page 6). The high school student may pursue the conventional plan of earning 210 Carnegie units by the textbook and activity process. Also available is an alternative charter school option of earning course credit by demonstration in the areas of communication, life skills, history/geography, government/politics, mathematics, science, foreign language, and visual and performing arts, as documented in the website handbook. All course information is available on the website; education specialists advise students using this and other information, reviewing student goals regularly. Recommended A-G texts are listed for college prep students, as is general education and community college information.