

D. Culture

The school is a safe, clean, and orderly place that nurtures learning. The culture of the school is characterized by trust, professionalism, and high expectations for all students, and a focus on continuous school improvement.

Findings:

It is the belief of CWCS that the home is where a young person's life-long love for learning is established, and positive values and beliefs are formed.

With the home as the predominant school environment, students and parents along with their Education Specialists can work together closely and enthusiastically to ensure each student's academic needs are met. CWCS's home-based style enables students and families to learn within a safe, secure, and orderly environment. During monthly, bimonthly, or weekly meetings, families are encouraged to ask for and they receive the help they need for their children to achieve the expected schoolwide learning results. Teachers set high expectations for their students and feel that providing individualized curricula based on students' learning style and appropriate developmental level allows students to progress at his/her own pace which enables them to do their best and to feel successful, many for the first time. Furthermore, parents feel they can protect their children from a sometimes intolerant and distracting public school environment by collaborating with a teacher in a place other than the traditional school environment. At home families and teachers can continuously build, nurture, and maintain trust, thus allowing students and parents to learn in a relaxed, positive environment.

In addition to teacher collaboration, other school staff nurture academic success and provide a safe, orderly environment for our students. Parents may chose to enroll their children in small group classes taught by credentialed teachers at CWCS school sites. The staff at these sites are professional and provide another resource to help families. They furnish information about classes, enrollment, activities, and many other aspects of CWCS, and they maintain a lending library for families and teachers. They too share a sense of purpose and enthusiasm that is focused on student learning. CWCS has two learning centers, one in each of the largest counties that we serve, the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties. Our other students can take classes offsite or join into an already existing class. All of our students have the opportunity to participate in small group instruction classes which may include, Algebra, Biology, Spanish, and Art, just to name a few. Efforts to improve organization as needed are demonstrated at the sites. Administration is working on providing other options outside the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties with locations where classes can be taken.

Other locations provide our student's with opportunities for real-life, context-based learning in optimal environments through community based educational programs and group seminars, independent learning, field trips, and apprenticeships. In this way, the entire community serves as the school campus. All CWCS staff makes an effort to

encourage and support student learning outside the home and school. CWC understands that making real life connections within the community facilitates important learning that may not be measurable on standardized tests.

CWCS continues to maintain and improve communication between administration, teachers, supporting staff, and parents to provide a positive, safe learning environment. Currently, CWCS uses technology, to a large extent, to keep family and teachers informed of school changes, activities, curriculum, classes, higher education, a wide variety of vendors available to families, and other pertinent information. Ongoing efforts are made to improve the uses of technology. Teachers, however, are also responsible for relaying important information to families without the advantage of computers. Research and innovations to aid in school improvement and development are regularly shared in formal and informal ways by administration, teachers, supporting staff, as well as families. Efforts are being made to address teacher's concerns to keep them updated about any changes related to school policy and student learning, ahead of time.

(include survey data on technology) We have not evaluated that data yet...correct??

Strengths:

- Home based meetings provide safe, orderly, nurturing environment for learning
- High teacher expectations for students based on student needs and ability
- Tolerant home environment
- Parents ask for and receive help from teachers and staff regularly
- School sites clean and staff helpful and professional
- Real-life learning opportunities encouraged and facilitated by teachers and staff
- Ongoing efforts to communicate and solve problems related to student learning

Evidence:

- Focus meetings
- Personal testimony of parents, teachers, and staff
- Teacher surveys
- CWC website
- Research data

Growth Areas:

- Continued efforts to maintain effective communication between administration, teachers, and families regarding changes and student learning via meetings
- Continued efforts to organize school sites for efficient use and distribution of information
- Identification and implementation of types and numbers of supplemental classes needed to improve student learning

- Continued efforts to improve use of technology to improve communication and to aid student learning

Leadership and Staff:

E 11. Based on student achievement data, the school leadership and staff make decisions and initiate activities that focus on all students achieving the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards.

E 12. A qualified staff facilitates achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results through a system of preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development.

E 13. Leadership and staff are involved in ongoing professional development that focuses on identified student learning needs.

E 14. The school leadership employs a wide range of strategies to encourage parental and community involvement.

Findings:

E 11. CWCS is committed to ensuring that students achieve the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards. To that end, leadership at CWCS works diligently to make effective decisions and initiate activities to promote student learning. Leadership believes one way to make effective decisions about education is by evaluating test results which illustrate to teachers possible strengths and weaknesses of all their students. The CST, STAR, including writing for grades four and seven, the CAHSEE, and the CELDT test exam results were examined. Two areas of critical need were identified, mathematics and reading/writing, although the test results did reveal that CWCS students performed better in English than Mathematics. While testing is not the only means of evaluating student achievement, given this information, teachers can work with parents and students to adapt curriculum and other activities which will better meet their academic needs and promote improved achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results.

It was also found that benchmark testing would be important for evaluating standard compliance. It was decided that student work samples would be evaluated using rubrics. The rubrics would be based on expected schoolwide learning results and targeted academic standards. Administration put together rubrics, and teachers collected samples of student's work in mathematics and composition. Focus groups comprised of teachers and parents examined and scored the samples, and they were then returned to leadership members for evaluation. The results were used to determine what action would be taken by administration and staff to provide parents and students with the support they needed. Included in the evaluations were measures to identify students who required remedial

work or special education, and also to recognize student improvement. In the future, development of other strategies for testing benchmark learning and for providing improved rubrics for teachers and parents will be discussed. Recently, CWCS administration purchased spelling, grammar, reading, writing, and mathematics texts and study guides for grades K through 12. In addition, they provided families with information about various vendors in their communities. The vendors can assist them with writing instruction for their children.

Leadership at CWCS promotes a means for a full continuum of services for our identified special education students. All are monitored throughout the school year for accountability and achievement. Special education youth participate in CAT-6 or the CAHSEE unless waived from standardized testing by parent, or they complete an alternative assessment to measure progress. Goals and objectives for a student's IEP are developed based upon California State Standards.

Though some parents at CWCS may be philosophically opposed to testing, it was pointed out by leadership that teachers need to discuss the importance of testing with families as it relates to the success of the school. The leadership also sent mailings and created newsletter articles discussing the importance of testing. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires 95% of the students be tested. CWCS promotes measurable pupil outcomes. The measurable pupil outcomes means the extent to which all pupils of the school demonstrate attainment of skills, knowledge, and attitudes specified as goals in the school's educational program aligned with California State Frameworks and Content Standards. Students will demonstrate competency in seven (7) growth area goals. The extent to which students achieve these goals is determined by mastery of the student standards and by demonstrated proficiency on STAR-specific assessments and other assessments.

Additionally, student progress will be assessed through a variety of the following, monthly review of work, annual portfolios, parent, student, and teacher evaluations, student demonstrations, student grades, and student self-evaluation.

Findings:

E 12. and E 13. All charter school students are assigned to an Education Specialist who shall hold a Commission on Teacher Credentialing certificate, permit, or other document equivalent to that which a teacher in other public schools would be required to hold. CWCS and/or IEM may hire additional certificated and non-certificated personnel to assist in providing supplementary instruction, management and support services. All staff of CWCS will have the necessary qualifications, skills, experience and credentials to fulfill their job description. These documents and job descriptions shall be maintained on file at the charter school and/or at IEM corporate headquarters and shall be subject to periodic inspection upon request by the chartering authority.

CWCS provides a formal system to share and build staff expertise. Once hired, teachers participate in an initial online training program. This program includes, an IEM

philosophy video, and 14 phases to be read, covering attendance, learning choices, learning records, portfolios, purchase orders, computers, curriculum, and seven other categories related to an educational specialist's responsibilities. Each phase has several subcategories to read. For example, Learning Records are a vital part of an ES's job. Phase four covers learning records. Within that category a teacher reads about learning record policy and procedure, high school learning records, learning records do's and don'ts, checklists, growth areas/ subject guides, Bloom's Taxonomy, and other topics related to learning records.

In addition, an ES advisor is assigned to an ES to answer educational questions during and after the initial training. Another way important information about the ES's job is communicated to them is the ES List serve. It is a system whereby information about upcoming events and group educational activities, classes, internships, cooperative learning projects, as well as school procedural changes, curriculum, and professional growth opportunities are emailed to them. It is ongoing and timely.

Teachers and advisors meet monthly throughout the school year to discuss new information related to their jobs, such as policy changes, to view training videos (available for check-out at any time), and to share and discuss their concerns about education and CWCS. Before each meeting ES's are required to read and copy an agenda and complete an agenda quiz or training assignment for that month. They bring all to the meeting for reference and discussion. A meeting compilation answering any questions raised is prepared and included in the school's online ES handbook and is available for ESs to view at any time. The monthly meetings and agendas are an important staff development tool for an Es. It was noted, however, that improvement is needed in keeping them updated about school policy and procedure changes.

The ES handbook, and CWCS's website, created and developed by CWCS leadership, and CTAP, and Edusoft, both also implemented by CWCS leadership, are examples of new educational approaches and professional growth opportunities at CWCS for both teachers and families. Edusoft and CTAP training are provided for all ESs.

Current educational practices are continuously reviewed, discussed, and shared at Parent Council meetings, comprised of parents, and at teacher's annual meetings for teachers, staff, and administration. Information gained from those meetings may also be used for ongoing professional development.

Findings:

E 14. CWCS was developed in response to parent and teacher request. Our most significant collaboration, by the very nature of our design, is with our parents who partner with us to be fully involved in their children's education. CWCS offers parents support and options to teach their children in ways that they believe their children learn best, and requires that the parents have a strong stake in the education of their child. Part of that partnership includes teachers and parents, and administration collaborating extensively to provide enriching community learning experiences using all community resources.

The administration has developed several strategies for bringing the parent community together for communication this past year. One, the parent list serve, like the ES list serve delivers important information by email about upcoming events from the staff or other parents. The online bulletin board has also been developed so that parents can discuss various issues of concern. Other networking activities provided for parents included, back to school night, open house, new parent orientation, quarterly parent council meetings, group educational activities (field trips), student craft activities, etiquette training for students involving parents as judges, and the end of the year school picnic. All of the events were well attended.

Parents can also learn about school and community events by reading the CWCS monthly newsletter, online, informing them of any upcoming events they might want to attend. At these events they may network with other parents. For families who do not have the advantage of a computer, an ES will provide all information to them as the need arises or by request.

Each month our curriculum department has made available a training meeting for parents, which we call Parent Monthly Curriculum Trainings (PMCT). This past year we offered them only in our two largest counties, Stanislaus and San Joaquin. In the 04/05 school year we will also offer the trainings in other counties.

Our parent council consist of 29 members who are parents elected from our school. They are also open for other parents in our school to attend and occur quarterly. This year each parent council member signed up and participated on at least two smaller committees. These parents gather as needed to complete the task of their committees which included, library grant, yearbook, educational group activities, senior and eighth grade graduation, back to school night, new parent orientation, open house, and accreditation. This proved very beneficial to the school. This year, we will also include a curriculum fair and more geographical location training opportunities for parents.

Strengths:

- Evaluation of various test results
- Curriculum adaptation based on test results
- Activities based on test result
- Development of rubrics for evaluation and identification of remedial and special ed students
- Full range of special education services offered
- Qualified teachers assigned to assist parents in all aspects of teaching and learning
- Extensive training program for teachers
- Mentors provided for teachers
- Monthly and annual meetings, handbook, Edusoft, CTAP professional development

- Parent list serve, bulletin board, networking opportunities, monthly newsletter, training workshops provided
- Governing board comprised of 29 parent members

Growth Areas:

- Monitoring of benchmark testing strategies to assess state standard compliance throughout the school year
- Development of rubrics for evaluating student work
- Need to impress upon families the importance of yearly testing for the success of the charter school
- Improvement in the area of relaying upcoming changes and new information to teachers
- Addition of a curriculum fair and additional training opportunities for families outside the Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

Evidence:

- CWCS charter
- Focus meetings and notes
- CWCS profile
- Staff and teacher testimonies
- Test data
- CWCS website

F. Vision and Purpose

The school has a clearly stated vision or purpose based on student needs and current educational research and the belief that all students can achieve at high levels. Supported by the governing board and the central administration, the school’s purpose is defined further by expected schoolwide learning results.

Findings:

It has been said, “It takes an entire community to educate a child.” Connecting Waters Charter School (CWCS) supports that idea and envisions parents and students working together with an extended family of teachers and the community to develop accountable, responsible, and contributing members of society who are independent, life-long learners.

CWCS identifies an educated person in the twenty-first century to mean a person who is literate, can understand and function sufficiently in the world around him or her, has an overview of the history of mankind, has an understanding of United States political processes, has an ability to solve mathematical problems, and to think scientifically, and has the values necessary to enhance the world in which he or she lives. This person is one who has realized his or her own unique educational interests, talents, or abilities, whether

it is in the arts, sciences, or other areas. It is the goal and vision of CWCS to help students become educated individuals who are intrinsically motivated to learn, and who have diverse yet well-developed interests.

The charter school was established on June 28, 2002 to serve K-12 students seeking a non-traditional educational setting. It's parents, students, certificated Education Specialists, and administration believe that the best learning occurs when, each curriculum is tailored to an individual student's learning styles, one-to-one teaching is used as appropriate, real life context-based learning is emphasized, there is supplemental enrichment through classroom instruction, independent learning, field trips, apprenticeships, and appropriate uses of technology. And, although schooling is viewed as one aspect of an education, the entire community serves as the school campus.

CWCS believes, by participating in real-life context-based activities in the community students learn to apply knowledge and learn new skills. It also allows them to see themselves as part of a community. When students participate in cooperative school programs comprised of small groups at one of CWCS's two school sites, or in classes within their community, they receive not only supplemental enrichment, but also an opportunity to develop important social skills. Initially, and throughout the school year, supported by CWCS's governing board (comprised of parents), and administration, all student's skills, goals, and interests are assessed in a variety of ways to ensure suitable modalities and curriculum are provided to meet their individual needs. Guidance by qualified teachers further enables families to do that, as well as to determine individual learning styles in order to achieve academic standards.

Keeping in mind the vision for CWCS students to achieve high academic standards, administration, parents and the teachers have identified two subject areas needing improvement, mathematics and reading/writing.

Strengths

- Assisting students and parents with educational guidance
- Individualizing curriculum to meet student's needs
- Providing materials, resources and supportive instruction
- Allowing flexibility in both teaching styles and learning styles
- Promoting real-life context-based learning
- Challenging students to achieve mastery of academic standards

Evidence

- CWC Charter
- Central Administration
- Focus meetings and notes
- Test data
- Rubric evaluations for analyzing student work

Growth Areas

- Meeting state standards in math
- Meeting state standards in reading/writing