

Recommendations:

The Committee recommends...

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| 1. That the administration work with the staff to create a systematic objective assessment designed to measure individual student growth. |
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Since the candidate visit last year, the administration and staff of Connecting Waters developed schoolwide benchmark assessments for students in grades 2-11. Our committee determined that an assessment system is important for the following reasons:

It validates parent choice; we can know when to give interventions to our students; students can test out of grade level and see progress; our students will receive more frequent feedback; NCLB requires all subgroups meet their targets; it will help our teachers choose proper curriculum for our students as they plan for school year; allows our school to know if we are meeting the needs of our students; and help remove test anxiety.

The assessment committee understands that there are several ways to assess our students: portfolios, demonstrations, observations, etc. However, the state considers the STAR to be the determining factor as to the success of our charter school. Since this is the case, it would be wise for us to provide an assessment system that will prepare our students for the STAR. The STAR/ CST are based on mastery of the California State Standards. Therefore, our assessment will be standards based. The committee read, discussed and concluded that it would be very difficult to teach every California standard in each subject by STAR testing. We decided to base our benchmark assessment system on the 'essential' standards.

We will assess Math and Language Arts in the 2004/2005 school year. We will add Social Science and Science in 2005/2006. We will add Visual and Performing Arts and Foreign Language in 2006/2007.

We will test our students 4 times a year. Our benchmark exams will be given as follows during the 04/05 school year: Sept. 20-24; Nov. 15-19; Jan. 24-28th; March 14-18. All assessments will be completed prior to the STAR testing and before the end of the school year. Please see benchmark assessment addendum.

We decided that we would have two bands, proficient and non proficient to measure the success of our students. Proficient is 80-100% and non proficient is 0-79%.

Studies show that 5 or more questions per standard would show whether student has mastered a given standard. We will have 6 questions on each standard tested.

The following is our benchmark testing plan for the next three years:

In the 2004/2005 school year we will test grades 2-11 in math and language arts, our determined areas of critical need. In 2005/2006 we will add grades k & 1 for math and language arts. In 2006/2007 we will test 12th grade students in math, language arts, and science.

Our benchmark assessments were developed using Edusoft. Edusoft is a web based standards based assessment program. All of our teachers and families are given access to this program and can access the benchmark exams when they are released for the testing period. Teachers will bring the exam to those students who do not have internet access.

Each year we will review our benchmark exams and revise the exams and process as needed.

2. That the administration develops strategies for bringing the parent community together for purposes of improving communication.

The administration has developed several strategies for bringing the parent community together for communication this year. The administration has developed a parent list serve where parents can receive information about upcoming events from the staff or other parents. The bulletin board has been developed so that parents can discuss various issues of concern. Each month our curriculum department has had a training meeting for parents which we call Parent Monthly Curriculum Trainings (PMCT). This year we have only offered them in our two largest counties, Stanislaus and San Joaquin. In the 04/05 school year we will be offering the trainings in other counties also. The administration provides a monthly newsletter which informs the parents of any upcoming event that they might want to attend. At these events they may network with other parents. Our other networking activities that we have provided for parents have included: back to school night, open house, new parent orientation, quarterly parent council meetings, group educational activities (field trips), student craft activities where parents had to attend, etiquette training for students that involved parent judging, and the end of the school year picnic. All of these events were well attended. Our parent council consists of 29 members who are parents elected from our school. Our parent council meetings are also open for other parents in our school to attend and occur quarterly. This year each parent council member signed up on at least 2 other smaller committees. This proved to be very beneficial to our school. These parents would get together as needed to complete the task of their committee. These committees were library grant, yearbook, educational group activities, senior graduation, eighth grade graduation, back to school night, new parent orientation, open house, and accreditation. In addition to the listed activities, we will include a curriculum fair and more geographical location training opportunities for parents next year.

3. That the administration works to increase the number of learning centers and expand the available course offerings at the centers.

The administration believes that our learning centers are a very valuable option for our students. In our independent charter school model our learning centers are one educational option for our families. They exist if there are enough families in a geographical location who desire a learning center. Due to the structure of our school and the limitations set by CDE's SB740 waiver process for independent charter schools, it is not possible for our school to fund a learning center in every city where we have students unless the teacher and the family agree to use a portion of the instructional budget for this purpose. We currently have two learning centers, one in Stanislaus County and the other in San Joaquin County. These counties have the largest population of students. We have offered many classes to our students at the learning centers. The Ceres/Modesto Learning Center has been very successful at increasing its course offerings this year. The Manteca Learning Center had a slight decrease in course offerings this year because a few of their instructors resigned. Our course offerings are also determined by our student need which may vary from year to year. In addition to our students taking classes at our learning center, we contract with outside vendors to provide classes for our students. These classes include but are not limited to: English, writing, algebra, art, science camp, geometry, Spanish, Tae Kwon Do, and music. Please see addendum of our learning center course and course offerings by county. We have included the 2005 proposed course offerings for each learning center.

4. That the administration provides additional professional growth development training for educational specialists and parents.
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Education Specialists (credentialed teachers) are provided with monthly Professional Growth trainings at required small group meetings each school year. Videos of key trainings are housed with the small group leaders (Area Facilitators) and are available for check out by the ESs at any time throughout the year.

In accordance with the Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform Program (ITSDR) guidelines, monthly trainings are provided in the areas of 1) teaching strategies; 2) classroom management and other training designed to improve pupil performance; 3) conflict resolution; and, 4) academic content in the core curriculum. Please see addendum of professional growth trainings provided throughout the 2004 school year.

For our parents:

We have information available online and in print from our monthly newsletter and we send out information on our "Parent List Serve" about many available resources and opportunities. ESs are required to provide this school information to all parents who do not have online access at their monthly meetings.

We offered a Parent Orientation and Back to School Night in August. We had an Open House which included some vendors, catalogs, and instructors available to help and answer questions. We also provided two new parent orientations in April. Many parents attended from the counties that we serve.

We offer Parent Monthly Curriculum Trainings (PMCT) - our various vendors meet with us and provide training as well as a question-answer time.

One of our vendors provided training in Multilevel Teaching and an overview of the curriculum that they have available.

Another vendor provided training on how to teach our intermediate, middle, and high school students to write. An overview of their curriculum was also provided.

We offered training on Japanese Fish printing and an introduction and overview of curriculum that they have to offer in light of the CA state standards.

Training was provided on what materials are available that correlate to the state standards in each grade level K-6.

Edusoft Training was also provided on how to use this new tool for assessments.

The parents were invited to our benchmark assessment workshop and planning meeting.

Training was provided on information about Computer Training offerings for our students.

Future Plans:

State Standards and Your Curriculum training in June 04.

In the 2005 school year:

Curriculum Fair with Vendor Trainings and Parent Workshops

Home School Basics

Writing for Your Student

Meeting State Standards

Making Learning Fun

Adapting Content and Approach to Learning Styles

We have provided wonderful workshops and trainings for our parents. However, many of our parents have not taken advantage of these opportunities. Next year we are going to provide workshops in local areas and also poll the parents of what would be helpful to them.