

Application for the Distinguished School Award

Submitted by

The River School

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COLLABORATIVE PREPARATION OF THE APPLICATION:

Name	Position/Title
Linda Inlay	Director of the River school, primary author
Sara Guciardo	Consultant to our Dissemination Grant, Implicit Curriculum Survey writer, primary author,
Mary Lynn Bryan	7/8 th grade Language Arts, Social Studies teacher, Team Leader/coach member of Leadership Team
Sara Euser	6 th grade Team Leader/Coach, teaching Language Arts, Math, and Social Studies, Member of Leadership Team
Alan Little	Math Department chair, Technology Coordinator, Team Leader/coach, Member of Leadership Team
Lisa Layne	Math and Science teacher, 7/8 th grades
Matt Denney	Language Arts and Social Studies teacher, 7/8 th grades/Student Council Advisor
Elissa Fleiss	Math and Science teacher, 7/8 th grades
Melissa Fleischmann	Art Department chair
Christine Ansley	Algebra Honors teacher
Denise Garcia	6 th grade teacher: Math, Language Arts, Social Studies
Heather Watson	6 th grade teacher: Math, Language Arts, Social Studies/ Student Council Advisor
Marcia Foster	Special Education Resource Teacher
Fawn Lustig	PE teacher and parent
Nancy Perez	PE teacher
Gentle Tassione	Drama elective teacher
Stephanie Stephenson	PE teacher
Ellen Patterson	Chorus elective teacher
Debbie Bommersbach	Band/Strings elective teacher
Debbie Bentley	Fiscal Operations Manager
Wendy Beltrami	Receptionist, parent, typist/clerk
Shalee Cunningham	President Charter Council
Bryn Owens	President, Student council
Janel Sizelove	President, Parent Advisory Committee
Melva Wright	Recording secretary, Charter Council, and parent
Lauran Hawker	Parent
Maggie Ford	Secretary to the Director, Office Manager

Section I: Background and Demographic Data

Background Information

The River School was established in 1995 through an arrangement with the Napa County Office of Education. Within the first year, the school transferred to the Napa Valley Unified School District, becoming the first charter school in Napa County. The original vision was to create a school with an art-based curriculum that promoted individual and social responsibility. The parents who began the school felt the need to create a charter that would explore various teaching methods and encourage the students to develop as individuals, learn to take responsibility for themselves and their education, and become contributors to their community.

Although the River School is only eight years old, the school's philosophy has been in existence for over thirty years. It is based on the Ho'ala Educational philosophy, which began in a small school in Hawaii in 1972 and was initially called "Individual Education."¹ It was the result of collaboration between a Catholic nun, Sr. Joan Madden, and an Adlerian psychologist, Dr. Raymond Corsini. Ho'ala, which means "awakening of the self" became the name of the independent school that Sr. Joan and Linda Inlay started in 1986. Linda Inlay, the director of the River School, was trained by Sr. Madden and spent formative years as a teacher and later as vice principal in this program. Ms. Inlay brought the Ho'ala Education program to the River School because she found that it encourages personal and social responsibility and creative problem solving skills. These skills enhanced the River School's vision of developing independent learners.

River School is located in Napa, California, a complex geographic location with social, economic and ethnic diversity. The leading industries are wine and tourism based. The populace reflects some of the statewide changes in population growth. The latest figures place the white/not Hispanic population at 53% with the Hispanic population nearing 35%. The remaining 12% encompasses approximately 2% African American along with Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian. The median income is \$43,000 in an area where housing costs are soaring. There is a farm worker contingent that is hard to enumerate. Some are here illegally and some are legal but migrate to various counties depending on availability of work. More and more the farm workers are staying year-round and their children are entering the school systems.

Napa Valley Unified School District is the largest school district in the county of Napa. It operates 24 elementary schools, 4 middle schools (counting River School), and 3 high schools, serving 16,979 students.

¹ Timothy D. Evans, Raymond J. Corsini, George M. Gazda, "Individual Education and the 4Rs," *Educational Leadership*, September 1990.

Table I. River School Enrollment: 7 Years

Year	Average Daily Attendance
1996-7	66.35 (first year of charter)
1997-8	70.81
1998-9	72.96
1999-00	95.54
2000-01	148.5
2001-02	154.3
2002-03	180 currently enrolled

Since its inception, the school has attempted to reflect the ethnic population of the community. Although it has not yet achieved this goal, the school has made progress towards this end through recruitment efforts, including bilingual information meetings, translated materials, and advertisements in local Hispanic newspapers. A more specific breakdown follows:

Table II. River School Demographic Data

ETHNIC CODE	<i>River School</i>	<i>NVUSD</i>
American Indian	2%	1.7 %
Asian	2.75%	1.3 %
Filipino	1%	1.8
White	88.75%	62.2 %
Hispanic	2.75%	33.1 %
African American	2.75%	1.2

- Thirteen (8.3%) qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.
- Twelve students (6.7%) have a primary language other than English.
- Seven students (3.9%) receive special services under formal IEPs (Individual Education Plans).

Spring 2002 Standardized Test Results

- **API:** We attained a score of **843**, meeting our school wide target by growing 36 points, which was the highest growth score in Napa County.

- **SAT9 - Grade Level Averages:**

County averages are in parentheses.

7th and 8th grades include the comparison 2001 scores for the same cohort group:

Example: 7th grade Reading **85 (2002 score)** - 81 (2001) score

Note: there is no comparative score for 6th grade as they entered in 6th from schools all over the district.

Test	6th	7th	8th
Reading	80 (53)	85 - 81 (54)	74 - 75 (55)
Math	84 (67)	82 - 80 (63)	65 - 67 (58)
Language Arts	78 (61)	88 - 80 (66)	73 - 76 (56)

Spelling	74 (49)	73 - 77 (53)	56 - 60 (40)
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SAT9 Top Quintiles (60-99 NPR): Percentage of our students who scored in the top two quintiles

Test	% in top two quintiles	% in bottom quintile	% who increased by 1 quintile
Reading	78%	3%	15%
Math	72%	1%	6%
Language Arts	81%	3%	12%
Spelling	61%	9%	No comparative scores
CST/ELA	65%	2%	14%

District Writing Assessment:

- An average of 61% of our students scored 7 with an average score of 7.2 or above compared to the District average of 54%

CST ELA: % at proficient or above compared to district's %'s in ()

GRADE	CST ELA	MATH
6th	60% (35)	50% (34)
7th	72% (41)	49% (38)
<u>8th</u>	63% (37))	23% (24)

Student Discipline Data

Last year there were 13 formal out-of-school suspensions, and no students were recommended for expulsion. It should be noted that the school's "agreement system" (See Section III, 9) involves straightforward consequences without judgment for minor transgressions that in other schools would entail repeated reprimands from teachers.

Teachers, Administrators and Staff

Administration

Linda Inlay, the Director of the River School, has been an educator for more than 28 years. She began her teaching career in Hawaii in a private Catholic school, Our Lady of Sorrows and was instrumental in transforming that school into the Ho'ala School. After teaching in public schools in Los Angeles, and serving as NVUSD's GATE coordinator, she became the director of the River School in 1995.

Teachers and Support Staff

The nine full-time River School teachers, each with between three and 21 years' experience teaching, instruct the students in the core academic subjects of mathematics, language arts, science, history/social studies, and integrated visual arts. They are employees of Napa Valley Unified School District and holding appropriate California teaching certificates. The eight part-time teachers provide support in music, visual and performing art and physical education. Together, teachers are responsible for overseeing the students' academic progress and for monitoring grading and matriculation decisions as specified in the school's operational policies.

Additionally, the school employs a Secretary, Typist Clerk, Resource Specialist, Resources Instructional Assistant, Nurse, Speech Therapist, Psychologist, Technology Technician, Instructional Assistant and Financial Operations Manager.

School Facilities

The school is located in a residential neighborhood in the Southwest area of Napa. Through two bond measures, the 1960's era building is being extensively renovated to add another middle school. The River School will collaborate with that school to share athletic facilities, library, and a multi-purpose room. The current school is comprised of ten classrooms, a library, an office, and a courtyard area, or quad, where students spend lunch and recess.

School Directions

From 80 or 680, exit to Hwy 12 and then Hwy 29 going north.

Visitors enter Napa Valley going north on Hwy 29, past the Hwy junction to Sonoma. They take the first exit, Imola, and turn left, taking the second stop north (right) along Freeway drive, which parallels 29. Passing under the Old Sonoma Road overpass, they take an immediate left, merging into Old Sonoma Road. The campus can be seen across the intersection. The River School entrance is right on Old Sonoma Road.

Section II: School Synopsis

At first glance, the River School campus looks like any other school, teachers at whiteboards, students in small groups working cooperatively, high energy abounds during recess. Upon closer scrutiny, one notices that students are open and friendly, are articulate and engaged actively in classes. A sense of community permeates the campus as students interact with one another; mutual respect is evident in student-teacher relationships even when disciplined. At the eighth grade promotion, the ten student speakers share eloquently what they've learned about who they are, about character, integrity and staying true to oneself, manifesting a high level of self-awareness and confidence. Every year, the audience is moved to tears.

Middle school is when students begin the individuation process of separating from parents and discovering who they are. These years, during which egos are fragile and minds are developing analytic powers, are foundational to success in high school and beyond. Recognizing this, the River School has created a school culture to support the special developmental needs of this age group. Working in both the analytic and affective domains is critical to educating these budding adolescents and through the Ho'ala Education Program, the River School has successfully balanced the two domains to produce high academic progress, significant parent satisfaction, and students who love school.

The school received its first charter in 1996 and renewed its charter in 2000. The River School successfully and consistently meets the terms of the charter by using a clear vision and expressed values to guide all educational and policy decisions. In alignment with the NMSA's focus on the developmental needs of this age group, the school charter states that students shall grow and achieve on two levels: academically and develop-mentally. As such, dual curriculums have been created to support these strands: the explicit curriculum, which addresses the academic achievement of the student and the implicit curriculum, which focuses on the development of the students' sense of self-confidence, self-motivation, and self-determination.

Student success in each of these strands is measured using a wide range of assessment strategies. River School students continue to achieve significantly above state and district averages according to the API and score at or near the top of all District and County schools on the Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT 9), and on the District Writing Sample. The eighth grade students have achieved above the national average on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam. Additionally, an assessment of the efficacy of the implicit curriculum was conducted by an independent researcher, the results of which demonstrated development along each of the character goals.

This success is due in part to the clearly expressed vision and the consistent alignment of the vision with all of the decision-making and organizational structures. The educational program; school governance; staffing; health and safety policies; racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic balance strategies, admission and attendance policies, and suspension, expulsion and discipline policies all support the schools' ability to provide students with a high-quality learning environment. An active Charter Council, comprised of the administrator and representatives from parents, teachers and the community governs the school and assures that the school adheres to state standards while maintaining the school vision.

Section III: Program Criteria

1: The River School's Educational Vision and Standards

Describe the process used by your school community for developing a common vision of what students should now and be able to do by the end of the 8th grade. Indicate the roles played by members of the school community. Discuss how the school and district are implementing state academic and other content Standards. Describe who the school and district evaluate and use state and local assessment data to adjust the school's improvement plan. Describe how results are communicated to the community.

The River School takes a collaborative approach to their vision, incorporating state standards, the school's charter, and the philosophical underpinning into the process. Each of these realms utilize input from stakeholders, including the Charter Council, teachers, the administrator, and most importantly, students. This dynamic, systems approach is the strength of its effectiveness and reflective of natural and social systems, in which all aspects of the River School program are interdependent and interconnected.

The overarching principle within this process is the stated educational vision refined from the Ho'ala Educational Theory which aims to develop self-motivated, self-disciplined, self-reliant students who take responsibility for their lives and contribute to their families, communities, and planet. We strive to foster the "Four R's:" **Responsibility, Respect, Resourcefulness and Responsiveness**. River School gives each of these qualities a somewhat unique definition:

- We take responsibility to mean "seeing oneself as the cause of a matter, as opposed to seeing oneself as a victim."
- Respect comes from "honoring ones abilities to make decisions," whether that person is a child or an adult, to the appropriate level.
- Resourcefulness is "a state of being ready to meet and handle a situation" and
- Responsiveness is "a sense of community, social interest, belonging and a concern for others."

This vision is used in creating the mission, curriculum, educational practices, discipline policies, and even planning the physical environment.

The mission of the River School was developed using this vision as the core, and incorporating the input of the Charter Council, which includes the administrator, community members, and representative teachers, and parents. It distills the Four Rs into specific qualities and skills, providing more detail to the vision and answering the question "**How will this occur:?**"

"The River School prepares sixth, seventh and eighth grade students for active participation in communities of the 21st century by providing a learning environment that emphasizes academic achievement, artistic expression, and personal and social responsibility. We believe that learning best occurs when the core subjects of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies are presented as an integrated curriculum. The program places particular emphasis on the arts, with opportunities for students to pursue interests in drama and music, since artistic creativity inspires and enhances learning.

The school's mission is to work as an alliance of students, parents, and staff to develop students who take responsibility for their own behavior, examine issues from multiple perspectives, assess and solve problems independently and collaboratively, communicate effectively in written and spoken form, listen actively, demonstrate mastery of the stated core academic areas, and become self-motivated, competent, and life-long learners. In addition, the school will develop staff members who recognize and nurture individual talents and challenge students to grow academically, artistically, and personally. The school also seeks to develop parents who support and promote the values embodied by the River School's mission and program and model responsibility through their active participation in the school's operations.

In order to actualize this mission, both the traditional, explicit curriculum of core and elective subjects and the implicit curriculum- which addresses how adults and children interact, the rules they live by and the social and physical setting- must be taken into account. We strive to assure all aspects of

the school: the educational practices, discipline system, communication strategies and school policies are in alignment with, flow from, and manifest the mission, while accomplishing the learning objectives.

Throughout the vision process, appropriate stakeholder input is incorporated. While the vision of the school remains relatively fixed so that it can provide unwavering guidance, the mission statement is revisited and refined periodically by the teachers and the Charter Council, thus keeping it attuned to the current needs and circumstances. In their annual planning meetings, both the teachers and Charter Council review the mission and educational practices.

The planning process also utilizes the substantive involvement of students to the level at which it is appropriate. Not only does this keep the curriculum and school policies germane and student-centered, but it provides an avenue for them to practice assessing and solving problems independently and collaboratively, communicating, and assuming responsibility- all key components in the mission.

For example, in developing curriculum, our staff reviews the state standards, puts the salient objectives in student-friendly language, and informs the students of these expectations. Teachers then involve students by posing question such as:

- What do you think we need to know to really understand this?
- How should we go about that process?
- How will we know if we succeed?

Based on their responses to these questions, the students and teacher develop specific curricular objectives, the learning process, and evaluative measures. Teachers use their knowledge and experience to help refine students ideas into usable goals and processes, but they remain true to the students' intent. Students may generate a list of questions that address the overall objective, and the teacher helps the students select questions that get to the heart of the objective and will provide the broadest understanding of the topic. (More detail on this process is provided in part 3.)

Because of the unique philosophy and practice, new parents and students are educated about the school's vision, mission, and goals in the initial orientation meetings prior to and upon acceptance in the school. Parents receive weekly newsletters and attend regular parenting classes that offer more insight and detail in these points. Required participation further enhances their participation on an experiential level. During the first two weeks of school, students learn about the implicit curriculum, academic expectations, policies and procedures in extended advisory sessions. Throughout the year, they participate in regular listening groups and Project Wisdom- a character education program- which further instructs them. (See part 7).

The River School presents an annual report to the district school board stating their progress in accomplishing their goals. This is available to all community members upon request.

2. Assessment

Describe how local school, and classroom assessment information are linked to statewide assessment in order to improve student performance and to ensure progress toward schoolwide improvement. Describe how the school is able to monitor and report students' learning of standards, both schoolwide and for individual students. Discuss how teachers in all departments/disciplines use assessment information to modify curriculum and instructional. Provide examples of assessment in English/language arts (E/LA) and math, including but not limited to: analysis of student work, writing samples, district-developed assessments, criterion-referenced assessments, interdepartmental/discipline collaboration, vertical articulation, etc. Provide examples of opportunities students have to evaluate their work against the standards.

Due to the River School value of both academic and social-affective development, multiple measures of assessment are used, including not only the state required norm reference test and California Standards Tests for the explicit curriculum but also assessment of the implicit curriculum. In this way, we measure our success teaching students academic standards as well as nurturing the Four Rs.

Our premise that everything in the culture teaches values requires that even the assessment format needs to be scrutinized to ensure it aligns with the school's vision and all three constituent groups - students, parents, and teachers - participate in the evaluation processes. When teachers alone determine

the grade, it implies that they hold all knowledge and students are passive recipients. River School teachers, therefore, explore different ways to include students in the process with reflective, metacognitive techniques, such as by asking:

- What do you think is the point or value of this lesson?
- What evaluative descriptors would indicate that a student understood?

Students then create their own rubric, evaluate themselves and their peers, determine their grade, and confer with teachers.

Other ways students are involved in assessment are:

- preparing and doing their own student-led, hour-long conferences, twice a year
- using student-created rubrics in core classes and elective classes, especially in visual arts
- evaluating teachers' behaviors on a five-point scale measuring such indicators as whether the teacher corrects homework in a timely manner, actively engages students in class, listens to student concerns, and willingly accepts responsibility for his/her own mistakes
- setting and evaluating goals for themselves,
- completing the Implicit Curriculum Survey twice a year on the four R's of the implicit curriculum.

In general, our standardized test scores on both SAT9 and CST exams are among the highest in the county of Napa. (page 3).

In the fall when the SAT9 and API results are released, our staff reviews, disaggregates, and analyzes the results to determine areas of strength and weakness and to guide our improvement plan for the year, (See Part 3 and 4). Recently the staff recommended the use of Arithmetic Developed Daily in our math program to reinforce arithmetic practice and the adoption of a new spelling program.

Students use the state standards in their portfolio assessments to mark their progress. Reflection is an important practice that allows humans to change behavior. Student reflection in class, assessing their behavior and attitude, helps to keep their focus and to “think about their thinking.” Examples on their “Snapshot” assessment in math include: *“I explain in detail the sequence of the thoughts I use when facing a task or problem. I provide a detailed analysis of how an awareness of my own thinking has helped.”*

Teachers also assess students in the implicit curriculum at the beginning and at the end of the year on a Responsibility Rubric. For example, the indicators of a Level 4 student include: willing to take corrections, takes joy in learning, cooperates in small groups, and self-initiates. Teachers work on one of three teams, creating rubrics together and assessing student work.

Parent are given information about student progress through Student Progress Records every four weeks and through the school's online grading system called ThinkWave, which allows parents and students to access progress at school and from home.

At the faculty week-long summer meeting session, the staff evaluates the school year, using the information from the State, District, and school assessment tools to determine what areas of the school we need to improve. This past June we:

- revisited our mission outcomes as a guide for curriculum integration,
- reviewed the school's culture, specifically the faculty lunch room discussions, and created a Shared Values statement of how staff was going to behave and support one another,
- used the student evaluation of teachers to work on self-improvement plans.

The quality of the school has been improved by looking at both the content evaluations of standardized tests and the context evaluations of school culture.

3. Curriculum and Instructional Practices

Describe how your school provides a comprehensive core curriculum in all subject areas that is articulated across grade levels and with feeder elementary schools and destination high schools, where possible. Discuss how your curriculum is aligned or is being aligned to local and state standards. Use examples from English/language arts and math to describe curriculum

alignment and articulation. Describe how standards-aligned thematic units are designed and implemented by teams of teachers. Discuss how all students are provided with a variety of learning experiences. Describe the selection of standards-based instructional materials. Discuss planning underway to align curriculum to standards to the CAHSEE.

In keeping with the vision and mission of our school, curriculum focuses on state standards for the core subjects but addresses the unique developmental, social and psychological needs of this age group. As they mature through the individuation process to become their unique selves, a host of external factors affect and distract them from learning. Thus, in teaching the core subjects, we focus on the context as well as the content.

We start with the state standards, then determine the best **manner** of teaching using brain-based research. This research states that humans learn best when knowledge (disparate facts) are taught in an interconnected manner. The National Middle School Association's position paper notes four levels of curriculum integration. The fourth and most complex level of this systems approach involves student input the most. Since our program envisions students as independent, lifelong and involved learners, it appears that this level of integration fits our vision and mission. In the past seven years, the River School staff has collaborated on a variety of such projects.

We begin with Big Questions such as:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What is human's relationship to the earth
- What is the United States role in the global community?

We then blend many of the standards together to help students create their own answers to these big questions. Creating their questions and answers challenges them to think critically. At the same time, this active participation in learning increases motivation.

Human's innate curiosity tends to slowly diminish in school when there isn't time to explore our own questions. Students adopt the attitude "Why bother asking?" To combat this, our students are given appropriate opportunities to explore questions within parameters set by the teachers using the standards. Before generating ideas, students need to understand the qualities of a good question. They can then choose their own questions within teacher-made parameters. Last year they came up with a list of qualities of a good question that included:

- leads to asking other questions
- has more than one right answer
- leads to multiple perspectives, and
- keeps you thinking.

The final project of last year was the question, "Who Owns Space?" which blended science standards on astronomy and the history standards on Manifest Destiny and Westward expansion. Students of all three grade levels were divided into fourteen teams who rocketed to one of Jupiter's moons because the depletion of resources had made Earth inhabitable. Students confronted questions about territorial rights, international law, survival of fittest or survival through collaboration. They had to determine how to get water, food, raw materials possessed by other groups. The culminating project was a Space Forum held by intelligent aliens (played by community and parent participants) who questioned members of each team about their actions in the simulation in order to determine whether earthlings were civilized enough to enter the intergalactic union.

In this student-centered, project and problem-based approach to teaching standards, we give students choices to explore their own questions. Interdisciplinary connections make knowledge meaningful and help to develop life-long learners.

It takes an enormous amount of collaboration among teachers to accomplish these projects, so time is given for common team preps as well as faculty meetings so that they can coordinate these units across the three grades. Teachers even gave up a weekend to work with Dr. Edward T. Clark, author of the book, *Designing and Implementing Integrated Curriculum*, which we are using to guide our planning.

With the help of a parent volunteer who is a high school English department chair, we developed a three-year Language Arts program that builds upon standards for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. To improve our spelling scores, we decided upon a spelling/vocabulary program individualized to the appropriate level of each student. Ours was one of three schools in the County to win \$5,000 in the Governor's Reading Program last year after instituting a Silent Sustained Reading period every day. Students are helping select new books using this award money. Wherever possible, we offer student opportunities to practice their language arts skills in the after school newspaper club, in spelling bees, writing contests, and presenting proposals for change in our school. For three years, students develop portfolios based on the California standards which help prepare them for student-led conferences.

We use the Portland State University's Visual or Integrated Math program because it fits with brain research on the developmental needs of middle school students, and focuses on mathematics as a discipline instead of arithmetic. We provide training for teachers and parents so that they can support students. Math is taught for the first two periods of day, thus allowing students to move up or down as is appropriate without affecting the rest of their school day and without tracking students in homogenous groupings for science and social studies. In addition to the three levels of Integrated Math (which integrates arithmetic, algebra, and geometry), we offer an Algebra I Honors class and work with the high school to allow qualified students to attend Algebra 2 Honors. To balance the need for arithmetic skills practice and expose our students to the format of standardized testing, teachers use the Arithmetic Developed Daily ("ADD"). Teaching math in this manner provides opportunities for students to use their language arts skills to present their point of view on a solution and to collaborate by presenting and defending their group's visual model of a problem.

Teachers use a variety of strategies and tools to teach the standards such as technology (including PowerPoint presentation skills or use of Excel to present data in graph and chart forms) and art integration in one block period every other week. We have a strong elective program beginning in sixth grade with a wheel of visual arts, chorus, and drama. Alternatively, students are offered a full year of band. In seventh and eighth grades, they choose a single program area to study. Over the years, we have built rigor into these courses by basing the curriculum on national art standards. The visual arts program is a three-year program, culminating in an "honors" type course.

Built in every academic project, students are given choices, including which assignments they will complete. There are extensions to challenge GATE students and opportunities for students to initiate their own projects. At the same time, students who need more structure are offered step-by-step projects that are less open-ended. Whether a student has an active Individualized Education or a 504 Plan, we make accommodation as needed to foster success. While less than 3% of our students are in the lowest quintile, (except for spelling at 9%); our goal is to support every student in improving. To that end, a dozen after-school clubs and programs expand the offering to our 180 students, including a Homework Club, Math Club, a jazz band, art and drumming. In addition, teachers discuss students weekly in team meetings; meet or call parents to discuss their child's progress and devise specific support plans that fit the needs of the individual. As one new teacher said in her first year, this school has more conferences than any other school she knew.

While we want every student to succeed, we delicately balance our responsibility to provide the support, good teaching, etc., with the student's right to choose to learn. Oftentimes, the adults take over the student's responsibility which leads to passivity and lack of confidence. We want our students to succeed because they actively chose to, rather than teachers made them succeed, which sends the implicit message that the student is not capable of learning on his/her own. Our focus is nurturing the student's intrinsic desire to learn, critical to actualizing a lifelong learner.

4: Teacher Professionalism

Discuss how professional development prepares all teachers, administrators, and other staff to help students achieve local and state standards through effective standards-based lessons in all curricular areas, particularly in English/language arts and

mathematics. Describe how professional development enhances the understanding of student developmental needs. Describe how professional development programs are selected and evaluated. Discuss the processes that support teacher professionalism. Describe the opportunities that are available for teachers to collaborate, broaden their knowledge, participate in decision-making, and share information with teachers from other grade levels. Discuss professional development provided for other school personnel. Discuss how new teachers are selected and supported.

Vision and mission provide the direction, but it is the staff that actualizes that vision and mission. Because our vision addresses both content (standards) and context (values in the school culture), professional development is a critical ingredient in our school. This process begins even before a teacher starts at our school with a thorough orientation on the school philosophy, professional expectations and the challenges of working here. Once hired, teachers are supported with a team leader/coach and invited to enlist a "listener" who provides a sounding board.

At most schools, teachers are isolated and essentially do their work alone. At the River School, the staff upholds the value on collaboration by working together as a team. Indeed, the most challenging aspects of teaching at our school is learning to model the very behaviors we are attempting to teach to our students. For instance, if we want our students to demonstrate our unique definition of responsibility as "willingness to see oneself as cause, instead of victim," then teachers need to take responsibility for their actions and not blame others.

We honor each person's ability to contribute to the whole school. Thus, group consensus decision-making is practiced wherever possible and appropriate. We have faculty meetings every week so teachers can have input into most of the decisions that impact them from budget to selection of textbooks. A guiding principle is *subsidiarity*, decisions being made at the lowest level possible. One extended faculty meeting a month we review the standards, brainstorm questions to help connect those standards to one another, decide on culminating projects from one grade to the next, and share experiences. In addition, teachers present mini-workshops on such topics as effective classroom procedures, visual tools of thinking, synectics (the use of metaphor to tie familiar to unfamiliar), and mind mapping. At the full-staff meeting that includes part time teachers, mini-trainings are conducted on listening skills, revisiting the vision, or assessing whether we are aligned in our classrooms. As previously mentioned, we use our end-of-year, weeklong meeting session to work on school improvement, including the three-year language arts program across the grades, and the development of a Technology Plan to support learning. (See next section). Teachers develop professionally by attending conferences such as those held by the National Middle School Association, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, California League of Middle Schools, CANEC (California Network of Educational Charters), and the National Conference on Charter Schools by the Federal Government.

Mathematics demonstrates our hands-on approach to teacher development. This year, our coordinator observed new teachers and gave them feedback; arranged for the new teachers to observe him modeling the facilitative teaching- an important skill in the math program; and team-taught with struggling teachers.

In order to encourage our students to be independent learners, we listen to their concerns and opinions, even in the realm of teacher development. Students provide teachers with feedback twice a year on specific behaviors related to the explicit and implicit curricula. Teacher behaviors evaluated in the Explicit Realm included:

- *Teacher is flexible in accommodating for individual student needs*
- *Teacher gives me good feedback on homework and projects so that I can improve.*
- *Teacher allows you to be active in the classroom learning environment.*

In the Implicit Realm, items included:

- *Teacher listens and understands students' point of view; s/he may not agree but students feel understood.*
- *Teacher's words and actions match.*
- *Teacher is willing to learn from students.*

Teachers use the feedback to improve their teaching while at the same time this gives our students a sense that what they have to say is important.

When our professional development addresses both the implicit and explicit, our staff learns and grows in a safe environment. Recently we addressed the faculty room climate and created a Shared Values statement of how we will behave with one another. This has since been adopted by our governing board.

5: Education Technology and Library Media Services

Describe the library media services that support teaching and learning. Describe your plan for technology use at the school site and the ongoing process of integrating technology into the total school program. Include accommodations to ensure appropriate technical assistance for staff and students. Discuss how professional development needs for staff are met, both in terms of enhancing technology skills and in integration of technology into the curriculum. Describe how students, certificated staff, library media teachers, and other support staff are provided with information and learning resources. Include examples of technology and library usage data. Describe the extent of electronic networking infrastructure throughout the site and beyond. Describe how the technology and library media services have contributed to improved student achievement.

Being a charter school demands flexibility and hard work to overcome challenges, and we have had to use these qualities to overcome two significant hurdles in our technology, library and media services. First, as a start-up charter we lack resources and secondly, with only 180 students we receive limited state funding. We successfully secured two grants (\$111,000 and \$44,000) from the Walton Family Foundation that allowed us to purchase thirty-five computers and a significant number of books and \$8,000 from the Follett circulating and inventory software to start our library. Winning the \$5000 award from the Governor's Reading program has helped augment our fiction titles. A County Gang Suppression Grant will enable us to purchase two laptop computers that students can use at home if they do not have their own. Our current books to student ratio of 10:1 and student to computer ratio of 1:5 are better than many other schools in our district. The availability of these resources and the institution of an SSR (Silent Sustained Reading period every day) have helped to improve reading scores in the school.

Our library plan focuses on the acquisition of titles that relate to the integrated curriculum so that students have access to research materials. Next year, when another middle school opens on our campus, we will share the resources of the new library/media center, contributing our books and Follett software. We do not have the resources for a credentialed media teacher so we rely on the talents of parents who have worked in other school's libraries to run ours on a limited basis.

Our technology component also depended on parent help that resulted in sporadic and oftentimes inadequate maintenance. Recognizing this, we used reserve funds to hire one of our teachers to become the technology coordinator this year. He created a comprehensive three-year technology plan aligned to our vision and mission that includes teacher training, integration of technology into the academic and elective classes, maintenance of the system, and development and maintenance of our website. Students have two technology periods a week to learn and hone technology skills.

A portion of the \$88,000 Dissemination Grant from the State allowed us to purchase digital still cameras and camcorders so that students can create videos about our school for dissemination while simultaneously dovetailing our video arts program. Our connection this year to our district's powerful network has helped stabilize our system, provided teacher and office email, and provided District data connections for Aeries and Reflections programs. Teachers now use a grading program called ThinkWave, which allows students and parents to view grades at home and at school. Student access to their own grades allows them to feel ownership of their learning, again, aligning to our vision of the independent learner.

The primary focus of our technology plan is the integration of technology into the project-based aspects of our curriculum. For example, last year after reviewing the breadth of standards that was not covered through the thematic unit *Who Owns Space?*, students chose individual questions relating to these standards, such as "Who killed JFK?", "Why are we boycotting Cuba?" or "How are fashions affected by political concerns?" and researched and presented them using technology. Five to six computers have been placed in each classroom for continued use throughout the day and the recent

purchase of a portable laboratory will enhance our “library without walls.” We are choosing to concentrate resources that help with open-ended research as opposed to purchasing software that uses games to teach skills. Thus, from very limited resources, we have been able to create a solid start on establishing technology as an important resource in our school.

6: School Culture

Describe the culture of the school and how it supports student success in achieving standards. Discuss how the school demonstrates the values of an exemplary middle school including such key elements as instructional strategies appropriate for the developmental characteristics of young adolescents, class scheduling issues, and exploratory curricula. Describe opportunities for students to provide service to their communities and to engage in organized service learning experiences. Discuss how the school culture promotes positive character traits and good citizenship. Describe the strategies used to ensure that students feel a sense of connection to the school and do not “fall through the cracks.”

The most powerful way to affect character and to create a culture of learning is not by posters on walls, nor by awards or t-shirts, but by modeling day in and day out the values we are trying to promote. As stated in Part 4, teachers and parents' actions speak much louder than the words. “*The medium is the message*” as McLuhan coined years ago, or as one of the founders of the educational philosophy of the program, Sr. Joan Madden said, “*You don't teach subjects. You teach who you are.*”

Organizational theorists such as Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, and James Schon recognize the importance of the culture of an organization in realizing its goals. A school is no different. John Goodlad's landmark text, *A Place Called School*, strongly articulates how the implicit, or hidden, curriculum embedded in a school's culture greatly impacts students' ability to learn, sometimes teaching values that the school didn't intend. For example, classroom activities that consistently use competition as a motivator teach that competition - winning over others - is valued over collaboration. Since every thing and every person in the school conveys character and values, and in an effort to assure that our culture reflects our chosen values, the River School pays attention to the implicit messages in all aspects of the school, including

- interactions between students and teachers (Are teachers condescending or authentic?),
- school structures such as discipline (Is making mistakes viewed as "bad" or as a learning opportunity?)
- governance (What values are conveyed in who makes decisions?)
- the process and format of reporting progress (Do students experience their report grades as a reflection of their efforts or as the judgment of an adult?),
- interactions between parents and teachers (Are parents viewed as an intrusion or as a partner?).

We begin with our vision of the Four Rs. We strive to actualize this vision by setting up a climate in which student's natural responses and desires direct them toward learning. As such, we make the following assumptions about human nature:

1. Human beings inherently want to learn. Personal freedom in the form of creativity and choice fosters learning and personal growth, while fear inhibits growth and learning.
2. Human beings are decision-makers: they grow and develop a sense of purpose, responsibility and significance when they are allowed to make decisions for themselves. All choices lead to growth, and mistakes are opportunities to learn. Human beings can make better decisions for themselves with complete information, including the knowledge that comes from self-reflection. Adults define the limits of decisions.
3. People thrive when they feel they belong and when they feel they are significant. People feel they belong and are significant when they are listened to, taken seriously, and feel needed.

We use these assumptions about human nature as a guide for developing culture, and attempt to reflect and model the vision in everything that we do. For example, since human beings need to feel significant and to belong, we focus on listening to our students, taking them seriously in their concerns, and providing opportunities for them to feel needed. To this end, homeroom advisories are treated as family communities. In listening groups, small clusters of students meet every other week to share

challenges and successes. The principal is available for students to meet with her to discuss their concerns. Homerooms rotate doing school-wide chores like watering plants and cleaning the quad. School meetings are held to discuss problems and arrive at solutions. Students are taught to request a conference and learn "active listening" skills so that understanding occurs and conflicts are resolved.

Genuine respect comes not from station or role, but from relationship and trust. Thus, relationships between advisor and advisees are foundational to building trust throughout the school. To foster this, homerooms attended the Ropes Course at the start of the school year. Activities are organized to build community within the teams and throughout the school. In academic classes, building relationship and trust is enhanced with the standards-based Focus Questions, in which students collaborate to generate ideas. Block scheduling for content areas provides an expanse of time to conduct activities that actively engage students in learning the standards.

Extra-curricular activities also broaden our students' perspective and offer creative outlets. In addition to the electives of band, drama, visual arts, and chorus; twelve after school clubs headed by parents and teachers involve a significant portion of the school community in such activities as jazz band, photography, nutrition, drumming, yearbook, Student Council, Homework Club, Math tutoring, etc. One of the special traditions at the River School is the yearly Talent Show, which includes about thirty different acts from dancing to singing to skits and poetry readings. The fearlessness of the students always impresses parents who cannot see themselves being as courageous as these students in performing before an audience of over three hundred people.

Trust and respect are also addressed directly through school wide discussions. A recent school meeting focused on stereotyping and cliques. Students shared their frustration about being labeled a "prep" or a "skater," instead of being viewed as a unique individual. Some wrote letters to the school newsletter about cliques dividing the school community. The continuing open dialogue is a healthy sign of the engagement versus passivity of our students.

One of our goals is to help our students to find their own voice. This means that they may enter our school fearful of speaking, but when they leave, they have the confidence to speak up and know that someone will listen because what they have to say is important.

All of the attention paid to the school's culture results in a decline in conflict, low absence rate, less of the "middle school" attitude, and cooperative and supportive students. As a public institution whose role is to educate future citizens, it is imperative that we teach character through the school's culture in order to support a vibrant democracy. When students feel emotionally safe with their peers, when they are not afraid of making mistakes because they trust teachers and know students will not laugh, when they engage in activities that draw on their interests and talents; they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward themselves, their peers, and to school. Instead of seeing these activities as "fluff," we see these as essential to providing a safe context for our students to do well in academic courses as well as nurture future citizens who are actively involved in their communities.

7: Comprehensive Academic and Guidance Counseling

Discuss how your school provides academic counseling and guidance for middle-level students and their families. Describe the processes in place to encourage all students to aspire to academic success. Describe the roles teachers and other staff play in providing academic advisement. Provides examples of how personal learning palsy are developed for students. Describe the strategies used to ensure that students are prepared for a broad range of academic and career options in high school, including special programs to support students from groups traditionally under-represented in colleges and universities.

With only 180 students, the River School lacks the budget to hire a credentialed counselor. Instead, we build from the premise that modeling is the most powerful way to teach and we support our staff - office and teachers – so that they can guide and counsel our students.

In response to the many physical, social, and psychological changes that occur in our students during the middle school years, we provide a strong advisement program in which the homeroom teacher develops a close and trusting relationship with each student, fosters trust among the students,

and advocates for the students in his/her class. As previously mentioned, a sense of community among students and between students and faculty is enhanced early in the year through the Ropes Course.

Adolescents commonly complain that they don't feel heard. Central to our counseling approach is the "listening group," in which small clusters of five to eight students meet with the advisor to share concerns, feelings, ideas, fears, challenges and aspirations. Listening groups teach student active communication skills and provide a place for them to connect personally, build trust, and share concerns in appropriate ways so that they do not "act them out" in class. Students address challenges to succeeding academically, learn to make goals, analyze the sources of difficulty, make learning plans, and get support from peers. Instead of focusing only on test scores and grades, teachers explore the *context* of the student's life that enables or detracts from their ability to succeed. In this environment, many students learn that altering their attitude can change how they feel about school and ultimately improve their grades, behaviors and experiences. The advisory and listening groups are lynchpins in the school's culture and help minimize discipline problems.

Project Wisdom on Fridays in advisory is an opportunity to reflect on some developmental issue like peer pressure or stereotyping. The catalyst for discussion and reflection might be an article on bullying in the newspaper, a selection from *All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten*, or a poem written by a student.

Although we find that truly listening to students on a regular basis is the most important element in counseling, students receive an array of guidance opportunities, both academic and social/ developmental. Former students returning from high school and high school guidance counselors visit the River School to help prepare eighth grade students for their upcoming experiences. The county's Gang Suppression Task Force organizes mentoring and tutoring for students from populations typically underrepresented in colleges. We've taken underrepresented students to the high school to meet with the counselor in order to support their transition to high school.

We find many issues originate in the home and as such frequently schedule conferences with families. We also offer regular parenting classes in order to support them in parenting adolescents. This year we start our first Father's Study Group, using the book, *Raising Cain* as a discussion point. When professional help is required, we recommend a selected list of counselors who understand the systemic approach we take to education.

With everyone in the school acting as a listener, a facilitator, the network of support is spread across the entire student population instead of the limitations of one counselor who handles a few students.

8 At Risk and Special Needs

Discuss the identification and assessment process of students at-risk and with special needs at your school. Describe the programs and strategies used by the school to ensure access to and success in the regular curriculum. Discuss how student differences are valued as assets. Discuss the programs and strategies used by the school to assist English learners (ELs) Describe support for staff to assist students with disabilities to achieve individualized education plan (IEP) goals, progress in the regular curriculum and be educated with non-disabled students. Describe the extended learning activities.

Whether a student is struggling in math because of poor skills, a GATE student with poor study habits or a special education student who has difficulty speaking up for himself, the River School strives to understand the whole child and operates under the assumption that all humans inherently want to learn. Each year we identify a number of students who need support not previously identified in elementary school, perhaps because of the challenging academic standards of middle school. Our team teachers meet weekly to discuss students on the team. Since the advisories get to know their advisees quite well not only through the homeroom period, but through teaching them in classes, they are able to identify concerns early in the year. After conducting Student Study Team conferences which illuminate underlying factors, a variety of strategies is recommended, including tutoring, Homework club, after school art class, counseling, homework check ins, and testing. We always involve the student in the decision making process because when students participate in making the decision, the plan is more

likely to succeed. Including students in conferences also demonstrates our respect for them and valuing their input.

The smallness of the school tends to attract some parents of special needs students. Before they enter, we work with parents and special education resource staff from the District to determine whether the school's unique philosophy of self-reliance will fit the student's needs and parent's expectations. If so, we create support plans, strategize with parents, schedule team meetings and parent/student conferences and provide a number of means to monitor the student's progress. Few EL learners attend the River School, and in general they do well in our program. In advisory, listening groups, and school meetings, students with social challenges are supported and their peers are taught tolerance. One student was identified with a form of autism. With support, he was able to speak of this condition with students and it became a powerful "teachable moment" for the rest of the school to learn to accept his differences.

We created a retention process that inculcated the values of the school so that students facing that possibility were given full choice throughout the process, instead of being enabled. Once all of the support services have been offered, we work to eliminate the fears and self-imposed limitations that prevent success. This means encouraging the student to take responsibility for his/her education. When a student wants to and is determined to learn, they are capable of overcoming enormous obstacles. For example one student who was retained turned around his attitude and improved his SAT9 scores by three quintiles, from 11% in reading to 77%.

Due to our unique approach which holds the students accountable for their choices, including whether or not they turn in homework on time, more students earn D's and F's at our school than at most schools, especially during students' first trimester. Eventually, they learn how to become responsible for their learning but this frequently occurs after their grades plummet. Occasionally this results in students having to attend summer school through the district's program.

As opposed to elementary school where teacher and/or parent assure success, we prepare students for high school by teaching them attitudes and behaviors of accountability and responsibility, so that they understand that it's up to them to get the work done. Students coming back to visit from high school commonly comment, "High school is so much easier than the River School" because they have learned those valuable lessons about self-reliance.

9: Safe and Healthy School and Coordinated Services

Describe how your school ensures a safe and secure learning environment and supports student health. Discuss programs that promote healthy student behaviors and programs that keep the school free from drugs, alcohol, tobacco, crime, and violence. Describe how the school culture and staff promote appropriate student behavior to protect the safety of all, including collaboration with local law enforcement. Discuss who the school supports the coordination of health and social services for students and families in the community. Describe how the school's physical condition reflects the learning environment of an exemplary school.

When students are respected and heard, they are less likely to act their frustration and anger out in violence, vandalism, or disrespect of others, and more likely handle their concerns in effective ways, especially when the school values and has structures that encourage listening to their concerns. The River School discipline system, referred to as the Agreement System, is the core of our school safety. The guiding principal of the Agreement System reflects our goals: "Take care of yourself, take care of others, and take care of our school." It is based on the assumption that humans grow and develop a sense of purpose, responsibility and significance when allowed to make decisions for themselves. We view the Agreement System as a learning process for students to practice making choices. Adolescence is a period where students push the limits; they are beginning the psychological individuation process to break away from parental control and start to stand on their own two feet. Thus, our Agreement System has clear limits without being legalistic, is communicated in a way so that students understand the purpose, and provides opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes and to be heard. We have developed a school culture that states that mistakes are opportunities to learn, thus diminishing students'

sense of fear, which we find to be the underlying cause for lying, blaming, making excuses, and justifying choices.

When students choose inappropriate behaviors, they are not lectured or scolded or shamed. In a calm manner, they are told “You’ve made a mistake, which is usually how human beings learn. When you make a mistake: acknowledge your mistake, clean it up, accept the consequence, learn from it so you don’t do it again, forgive yourself, and try again.” When we model these behaviors, students have less “attitude,” take responsibility for their actions, are kinder to their teachers and peers, have less conflicts, like school, and progress academically.

When there are conflicts, we employ a simple conflict resolution process termed, “Call a conference” the goal of which is for each person to understand the other. The process, using active listening and a facilitator, is used between students, between student and teacher, between parent and teacher, between teacher and teacher, between parent and student. The majority of conferences succeed and students willingly apologize without being asked. We never “make” students apologize, because if they are not ready to apologize, we don’t want them to lie. We also work with parents so that they respond reasonably and don’t react out of fear or anger which fuels student lying or blaming.

Bullying is rare on our campus. Students are empowered to speak up. Slowly over the years, the student code of silence is dissipating as the attitudes of the students change. Students feel comfortable reporting even the smallest forms of sexual harassment like off-color jokes. We deal with each complaint as an opportunity to educate our students. Because we respond to the less serious forms of sexual harassment at the beginning of the year, following our district’s no tolerance policy, the number of complaints diminishes as the year goes on.

The Agreement system addresses small behaviors so students learn to avoid more serious consequences like suspension or expulsion. A variety of additional programs augment our Safety and Health Services:

- Students participate in a standards-based PE program, the goal of which is to enhance fitness and develop life-long habits.
- Sex education is taught in seventh and eighth grade by advisory teachers in order to create a safe environment to discuss their concerns.
- The school nurse visits the school twice a month. She checks records, offers sex education for sixth grade students, and reviews medical data in the CUM for SST’s.
- Our drug and alcohol prevention programs are integrated into the science and physiology and anatomy classes. In Listening Groups and Project Wisdom we discuss the context that give rise to the desire to use drugs. In general, drug use has been nearly absent at our school.
- Our School Safety Plan has been created and regular drills are conducted.

10: Family Partnerships

Describe the strategies used by your school to engage its families and communities. Describe how members of the school community work together to support student learning, and how families are assisted to be collaborative partners in the education of their children. Describe how the school communicates with families and encourages community from them, including those who are not fluent in English. Describe school/community partnerships and how community and family resources are used to support student learning, strengthen the curriculum and expand student learning. Discuss who the school develops student awareness of the connection between school and careers.

The founding parents of the River School recognized the importance of parental involvement and the partnership between families and school. Parents participate in the school in a variety of ways, offering input and ideas, and are supported in their growth as parents of adolescents. The Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of three elected parents from each grade facilitates the parent participation program, helping parents find jobs and monitoring their hours. We require at least 50 hours of participation in activities ranging from building shelves to painting walls, tutoring, framing art, and serving on fundraising committees. Several of our Latino families helped with organizing the Art Department’s Day of Dead celebration involving seven different stations. Parents’ talents and interests

are used to help with non-teaching tasks so that teachers can concentrate on teaching. Fundraising events, such as the Ole Mostaza has raised \$18,000-\$27,000 annually. This money goes to augment the budget, enabling the school to offer a wide range of electives and Listening Groups. Parents organized a Jobshadowing Program for 8th graders who learned about resume writing, took online interest inventories to determine what fields might interest them. Students were then matched to a specific job and spent half a day shadowing at a local business.

Building the habits of participation into the culture has taken an enormous amount of work and collaboration among the PAC, the Charter Council, and administration. Each year the program is refined and improved and more families succeed in their commitment. Participation not only serves the school but also offers parents experience in the unique ways that the school staff relates to students and teaches academics. More than one parent has said, “Until I chaperoned the Overnight (or Outdoor Ed or worked in a class), I didn’t get the program.”

Parents tend to want to protect and to do for their children out of love. However, when the goal is self-reliance, parents must learn to allow their children to take responsibility: to make their own choices and suffer the consequences of their choices within appropriate limits. Another way we support parents to “let go” is with parenting classes, including a Father's Study Group mentioned earlier. We are developing a Parent Listening program facilitated by parents through the Dissemination Grant and have completed a manual. Conferences are frequently held to address concerns. This is also an opportunity for staff to model the behaviors reflective of the school’s values, such as active listening, involving student input, and viewing mistakes as steps toward growth.

Advisors and teachers maintain good communication with parents through phone calls, notes and the ThinkWave online reporting system. In a bi-monthly newsletter from the principal, she communicates experiences and news. We are cultivating a core group of bilingual parents to assist in translating school/home communications.

Community relationships are built by working and playing together. School wide events like the Harvest Party, the Talent Show, Art Project Nights, Poetry Night, and the big fundraiser are organized so that grade level parents join together. The PAC and the Charter Council have dinner together periodically so that they can share ideas and to get to know one another, and this year the faculty will include the Charter Council in their Winter Social.

Last year out of 158 families, only one family was out of compliance in meeting their minimum of 50 hours of participation. Thus, approximately 8000 hours of participation was logged for our small school.

The success of the River School is the result of the following factors:

- Clear vision from which flows an aligned mission and goals which guide all curricular – both explicit and implicit – decisions. This vision is informed by a strong psychological theory and concomitant educational philosophy that is consistent with the National Middle Schools Association.
- From Charter Council to administrator to teachers and staff to parents and students, everyone understands the vision and mission of the school.
- Once understood, the vision and values are “lived” through the participants in the school and effectively modeled so that our students move toward the vision of self-reliant, independent learners who are successful in learning about the standards and about themselves.

The best evidence of our success is not on paper. The best evidence is in the students themselves. As we say, they are our best advertisement.