

# La Vida Charter School

## WASC Self Study

Western Association of Schools and Colleges



January 2010

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Parents & Students

# 1. School Community Profile

**LA VIDA CHARTER SCHOOL**

January 1, 2010  
WASC Leadership Committee

# 1. SCHOOL COMMUNITY PROFILE

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## Demographic Data

### The School Community

La Vida Charter School is located on the beautiful and historic Ridgewood Ranch in the heart of rural Mendocino County on Highway 101 between Ukiah and Willits. The large geographic county area, 3,878 square miles has a sparse population of 86,000 ( 23/ sq mi.) Serving the entire county, virtually all of the school community commutes, with Ukiah (15,500 residents) 16 miles to the south and Willits (5,073) 7 miles north and points beyond including Lake and Sonoma counties and occasionally the coast. Relatively isolated geographically and culturally, the nearest university is a one and a half hour drive away and San Francisco is two and a half hours south on Hwy 101. However Mendocino Community College resides in Ukiah with various satellite centers including Willits and Lake County which has an important impact on the area.

The median income for a household in the county is \$35,996, and 15.9% of the population were below the federal poverty line, including 21.5% of those under age 18.

Progressive politically, Mendocino county votes democrat and has held its own with grass roots campaigns against large corporate interests and capital. In 2000 it voted to decriminalize marijuana whose cultivation has accounted for the county's largest cash crop for the past twenty years. In 2004, Mendocino County was the first county in the nation to ban the cultivation and production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), in 2008 it was one of the few northern counties that voted against the constitutional amendment to ban same sex marriages, and recently in 2009 it voted to not allow the efforts Ohio corporation to rezone industrial land to accommodate mega mall interests.

The La Vida Charter School community is reflective of the county sketch above. Families tend to be interested in alternatives, many live in the hills, off the grid with strong beliefs about healthy living. In the first years of the school, families were adamantly against the state's standardized testing and refused to participate. It took much convincing and policy changes to raise the test participation rate from 50 to 95%. A significant portion of the community tends to be mobile, changing schools frequently up to three times in a year. With the incorporation of cell phones, phone numbers also change often .

## Parent Organizations

Parent groups are more or less active from year to year. The school was started by parents and educators, and parents have always served on the board. Currently two out of five board seats are designated for parents. In the past parents have created after school activities, field trips, and lead parent run lessons. a monthly day of specialty classes. Currently, the school sponsors a Parent Tea once a month for homeschooling parents to get together to talk about their programs, curriculum get advice and give the school feedback on what might be needed. Parents are asked to serve on one of are six committees that should meet monthly and report to the board at least twice per year. Unfortunately, the recent trend is one of less interest and involvement by parents who seem too busy juggling children at different schools and jobs besides homeschooling or independent study

Families are asked to volunteer four hours per month. Last year only 305 hours were logged down from 1028 hours two years previous (with 509 hours the year in between.) This does not include the four or so families who are generously supportive but don't record their time. Up until last year La Vida had a great deal of parent involvement which seemed unusual when compared to other charters and district schools.

Now, parent involvement seems more typical. The school administration feels that there is a relationship to less parent involvement and to the declining interest in Waldorf standards, see page 15 . The family lifestyle preference is changing at La Vida, to one that is less participatory and less community focused.

## Community Organizations and Foundations

As an independent charter, La Vida Charter School networks and looks to various educational, government and nonprofit entities for professional support, such as; Willits Unified, Special Education Local Planning Area SELPA, Mendocino County Office of Education MCOE, California Charter School Association CCSA, Alliance for Public Waldorf Schools and the Waldorf in the Home Group (Informed Family Life), California Consortium of Independent Study CCIS, as well as Mendocino Community College, School Pathways, and Northwest Evaluation Association NWEA.

Through community service the school and students are involved with numerous community organizations, such as: Ridgewood Ranch, The Butler Cherry Project, Bagged Lunches for the Hungry, Plowshares, St. Anthony's Kitchen, Humane Society, Senior Centers, Pre Schools, the City of Willits etc.

Financially, less than 2% of the budget is locally raised and managed by the La Vida Board who supports the school providing extras that would be a strain on the general budget. Specific projects have been funded by the board such as an educational project (NWEA), a site improvement project (roof and gutters) and legal support through the rechartering

process. Occasionally the school receives small community grants or student scholarships through: the Mendocino County Arts Council, The Community Foundation, Rotary Club, Ukiah Natural Foods, CREER, and Waldorf School of Mendocino County's Pastels on the Plaza.

### **WASC Accreditation History**

La Vida Charter School received WASC candidacy in May of 2007 with Kathi McCulla as the Initial Visiting Team Chair. Four areas for focus improvement were identified for the initial report which were; Curriculum, Achievement Accountability, Retention of Student Population, and Technology. The school has made additions and improvements in each of the areas except Retention of Student Population. The highly mobile nature of the community remains the same. Through entrance and exit interviews it is clear that most families do not see independent study and homeschooling as a long term way of life.

Rather, for most, it serves a need for the moment. The school has also observed a five year cap for core families who have chosen homeschooling as an intentional way of life. After five years of school support, parents are ready to go out on their own and file as a private school with the state. The other focus areas, Curriculum, Academic Accountability and Technology are covered in detail in this report.

### **School Purpose:**

From the school's Charter.

### **Mission**

The mission of the La Vida Charter School is to broaden the educational choices and opportunities for children and families who live in Mendocino County and surrounding areas through independent study, home schooling, and Waldorf inspired teaching methods.

### **Goals**

Our goal is to establish a school in which all children are respected and recognized for their individual gifts, and feel supported in developing these gifts. Students will be appreciated for their unique ethnic and cultural backgrounds and will be encouraged in their understanding of the individuality represented by the traditions and cultures of their peers, as well as members of the global community. Through a three-pronged approach focused on cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skills, La Vida's children will emerge with strong potential for academic excellence, a commitment to the enhancement of their community, and the ability to succeed amidst the challenges of today's and tomorrow's world.

La Vida's target population is those interested in home schooling or independent study, as well as those interested in Waldorf Education. La Vida serves students from Kindergarten through twelfth grade. La Vida offers two choices of completely independent study educational programs for student enrollment:

A blended program using a partial on-site class-model inspired by Waldorf education for students grades K-12 along with home study. The on-site portion of the independent study program offers parents and children a variety of education choices, including part-time day classes and other specialty courses. Designed as an enhancement to the home study program, the on-site program is considered a non-classroom based education for purposes of attendance recording. Parents and students meet with an Educational Coordinator who assists and manages the educational program.

Home school program for students grades kindergarten through twelfth, where parents can choose to utilize Waldorf inspired methods, or other Independent Study curriculum in which parents collaborate with an Educational Coordinator to achieve teaching goals and objectives.

### **Expected Schoolwide Learning Results, ESLRS**

Using the Charter and input from the school community the six Expected Schoolwide Learning Results were created. They are:

1. Information and Communication: (Math)

Students will possess knowledge of and an ability to demonstrate and apply mathematical processes and concepts including basic arithmetic, algebra, and geometry.

Information and Communication: (Language Arts)

Students have knowledge of and the ability to demonstrate skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking and presentation.

2. Thinking and Problem Solving:

Students will possess the ability to think critically, logically, and use the power of imagination for comprehension and to solve problems and make informed decisions.

3. Interpersonal and Self-Directional Skills:

Students will demonstrate self-direction, self motivation and possess self-knowledge; and develop a curiosity to pursue continued and active real life learning.

4. Technology:

High School students will have a basic understanding of technology, including computers, internet and its application in and outside of the classroom.

5. Real World Context:

Through exposure and observations of real world experiences, students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of all core subjects.

6. Capacity for Empathy:

Students will demonstrate empathetic skills such as respect, compassion, a sensitivity and understanding of real world and cultural differences through various modes of expression (including but not limited to; writing, projects, artwork, drama.

### Status of School

La Vida Charter School opened in 2001 and was under the auspices of Ukiah Unified School District for the first five years. In 2006 the school received authorization under Willits Unified School District as the school was determined to be within the Willits District tax roles. Last year, May 2009 Willits renewed the charter for five more years, expiring in June 2014.

The charter school does not accept federal funds, and therefore does not participate in the program improvement ranking under the federal Adequate Yearly Progress, AYP. The charter school typically meets three of the four criteria for AYP, but not the graduation rate. The small size of the classes and the mobile nature of the population are a handicap with regards to the federal formula for graduation rate. More information and statistical data will be found in the School Performance section page 27.

As a charter school, Willits Unified School District provides oversight and receives regular reporting from the charter school as stipulated in the MOU. The charter school also complies with the regulation to be reviewed by an independent auditor each year. Robertson and Associates has been hired by the school for the past four years with no qualified findings in their audit reports. The school is not evaluated by any other agency and it is not involved in any government improvement program or state audit reviews.

### Enrollment Data

In 2008-2009 the school felt the pinch of declining enrollment, down about 20% from the year before. Consequently, a shift in demographics can be discerned, to one that is less varied.

The school expects lower enrollment to continue through the spring of 2011 and then to return to the former slightly higher numbers. In the charter document, La Vida agreed to a maximum enrollment of 100 students.

### 2008-2009 Enrollment Summary

#### In and Out

Beginning	76
Gains	28
Losses	33
Ending (May)	71
Total Enrollment Activity for year	104

#### Destinations

In- District Transfer	3
California Public School	18
Private School	2
Dropped out of school	2
Graduated during School Year	6

#### On-site/ Off-site

On-site	57 or 80%
Independ. Study Only	14
On-site K-8	44
On-site 9-12	27
Off-site K-8	5
Off-site 9-12	9

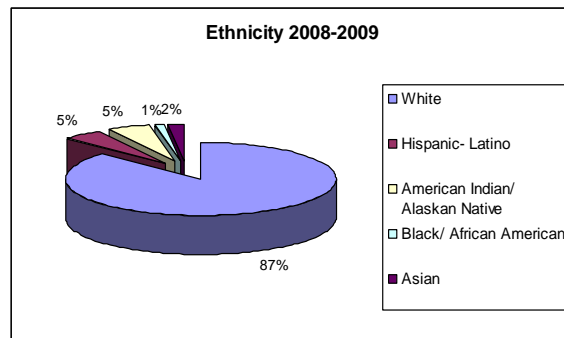
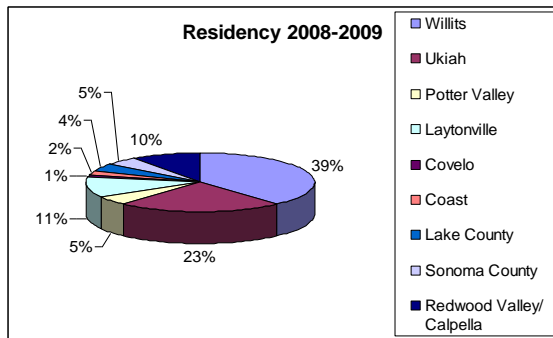
### 2008-2009 CBEDS Enrollment by Grade (year's fluctuation)

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Number	7 (9)	7 (8)	6	3 (5)	3 (4)	6 (7)	7 (7)	1 (4)	7 (11)	2	4 (12)	11 (19)	8 (11)

There was no consistent Waiting List

#### Gender

39% Female 61% Male



**Residency:** In 2008 – 2009 enrollment of students from Willits moved up slightly, 4% from last year. Ukiah, Potter Valley, Laytonville, Covelo, the Coast, and Sonoma County all remained the same. Lake County is down by 7%, and Redwood Valley is up by 3%. The number of students enrolled was less in 2008-09, about 15 fewer, but the population distribution remained about the same.

**Ethnicity:** The change in demographics in the 08/09 year is apparent in the shift to a larger white population and fewer Hispanic and American Indian students. 87% white is 14% up from last year and 23% higher than the District (64%) (County average 80.76%). Hispanic and American Indian are down to 12% all together which is 21% less than the district (County average 21.24%). Asian and African American populations remained the same and are par with the District.

### Language Proficiency

All students spoke English as a primary language, therefore there is no CELDT /R30 data.

### Attendance Patterns

#### Attendance Rate

At P-2—95.3%, (Goal 95%); (93.70% in 07/08; 98.26% in 06/07)

#### P-2 ADA

67.7 ADA (82.84 in 07/08)

#### Mobility

68%

### Truancy Rate

The school has a three strikes, policy with regards to the independent study contract. Truancy for the school are those dis-enrolled for non-compliance. In 08-09- 1%.

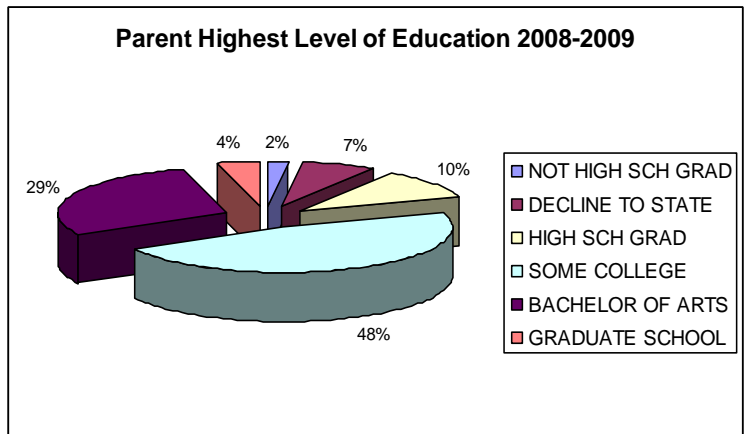
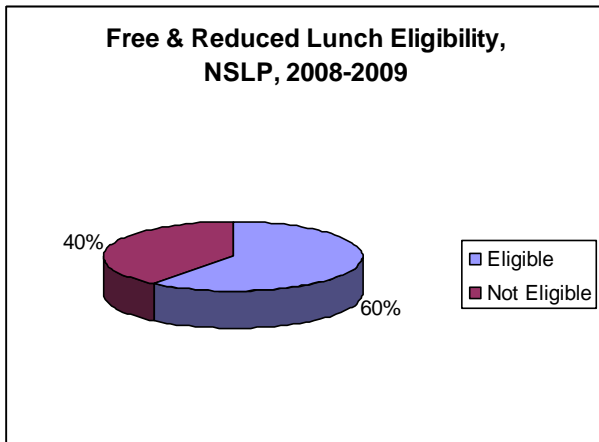
### Tardiness Rate

La Vida has a high tardiness rate for the on site classes but does not keep track because it seems pointless. Most arrive within 15 minutes of start time.

### Suspensions and Expulsions

There were no suspensions or expulsions.

### Socioeconomic Status



**Economic Indicators:** At La Vida the number of middle class families is on the rise. from 35% in 07/08 and 25 % in 06/07. Conversely fewer low income families eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch are attending the remote location. Two years previous 75% were eligible, with 65% in 07/08 and 60% in 08/09 which is 7% less than the District (67%). Overall fewer families can afford staying home with their students. More have to find jobs to make ends meet. The school also hears comments that it is too far to drive.

More parents recorded they had attended some college, 21 % more than the previous year. College graduates remained about the same. The number who declined to state and did not graduate from high school were slightly fewer. 16% fewer stated that High School Graduation was their highest level. In the STAR demographics La Vida's average parent education level is 3.22 which is one level higher than the District's 2.63.

## Special Ed

La Vida served nine (9), 13% of students with Individual Education Plans, IEPs and another nine with Student Success Team meetings SSTs, totally about 25% with special needs. Approximately \$21,318 was spent on services and support for special ed students. Revenues from the general fund were enough to pay for what was required and the school did not request additional funds from the District as agreed in the MOU.

The SELPA Director, Damon Dickinson, conducted an audit of the La Vida program in the spring and had no findings to report.

The school provided speech therapist services, school psychologists, nurses for health exams, RST support, and hired a special ed coordinator/ facilitator. The school is fortunate to work closely with SELPA program specialist, Sharon Mills and also worked with the District on policies and procedures.

The sub group of special ed students achieved adequate growth for the state targets in the API.

## School Safety, Cleanliness and Facility

La Vida Charter School is fortunate to rent its facility below market value rate on the 5000 acre Ridgewood Ranch, Home of Seabiscuit. The beautiful location is soothing for children and adults creating a milieu with few behavioral problems. Maintaining an environment where everyone feels safe is essential for students to fully benefit from La Vida's special program. The school attempts to deal with any issues as quickly as possible that may cause personal injury whether emotional or physical. People often describe the school as a sweet place.

The school has an Emergency Operations Plan which it improves upon every year. Each classroom has a manual. Fire Drills occur monthly with earthquake and shelter in place drills occur annually. Staff receives training and review of emergency policies during beginning of the year in-service and at least once mid year. Monthly inspections are logged for the grounds, playground, fire extinguishers and smoke alarms.

The 4000 square foot 1950's designer home is maintained weekly by a part time housekeeper and maintenance help whenever needed. The school and ranch split the cost of a new roof and gutters three years ago. This past summer the building was painted through a work training program sponsored by Mendocino Private Employment Council MPEC.

The school is inspected biennially by the risk management officer of the insurance company the last visit was June of '08. The school was commended for its compliance and had a few minor items to fix.

## Staff

The tables below reflect the current 2009-2010 school year.

Certificated Staff total- 11  
Core Teachers- 8

Classified Staff total – 7

## Demographics

Teachers	Number or Percent
Gender-Male	30%
Gender- Female	70%
Ethnicity: White	70%
Ethnicity: Mixed	20%
Ethnicity- Hispanic	10%

## Certificated Staff Qualifications

Teachers	Numbers and Percentages
Teachers HQT NCLB, Core teachers only	100%
Teaching outside Credential*	11% (portion of assignment)
Emergency Permits, Core teachers only	0
CLAD certified or equivalent	22%
BITSA	1
Interns	1
Educational Service in District 1 yr	18%
Educational Service in District 3-5 yrs	55%
Educational Service in District 6-10 yrs	27%
Years in Education Service 1-3 yrs	27%
Years in Education Service 4-10 yrs	9%
Years in Education Service 11-20 yrs	27%
Years in Education Service 21-44 yr	45%
Masters Degrees	3
Master Degree + 30 units	1

\* Because teachers wear many hats at the small charter, two have a portion of their assignment outside their credential area about 11%. The two newly hired teachers are in the process of fully complying. The science teacher who has an AA in science will be pursuing a single subject credential in that subject. Another teacher who has a single subject credential and a Masters in Education does not have a multiple subject credential for part of her case load. However because of her education and experience she may be able to receive authorization. Verification is in process.

- 1 Teacher qualifies as a Counseling Psychologist.
- Substitutes are usually acquired through MCOE.

### Teacher Attendance Rate

Because of the flexibility of the program, teacher attendance is high 99%. It is possible to reschedule Educational Coordinator meetings or work at home if a teacher is sick.

### Staff Development

Each year professional development opportunities are presented to staff in Waldorf Education, Differentiated Instruction and an array of technical topics. In 2008-2009 the following occurred.

- Master Teacher, Penni Sparks worked with faculty as a group and individually for 3 days.
- Form Drawing and Movement Workshop with Mentor Teacher Shauna Heiselt, who also worked privately with teachers.
- Two attended Master Teacher Leo Klein's painting class.
- One attended Sonoma State's Classroom Management course; also
- a Process Coaching class.
- One attended 3 day Waldorf Alliance Conference.
- Group trainings on New Report Writer System for Independent Study paperwork.
- Group trainings on Emergency Preparedness.
- Two were trained under Math Consultant, Jeff Simpson of Mastery Learning Systems, 90 min. per week.
- Two completed a year of BITSA support training.
- Charter School Association Regional Meetings
- Three at a 2 day training on Zoom, Data Director.
- Three attended one day WASC training.
- Several webinars on diverse topics by various staff.
- Monthly EC staff meetings & trainings.

## Student Performance Data Schoolwide Outcomes



### Parents Choice and the Standards:

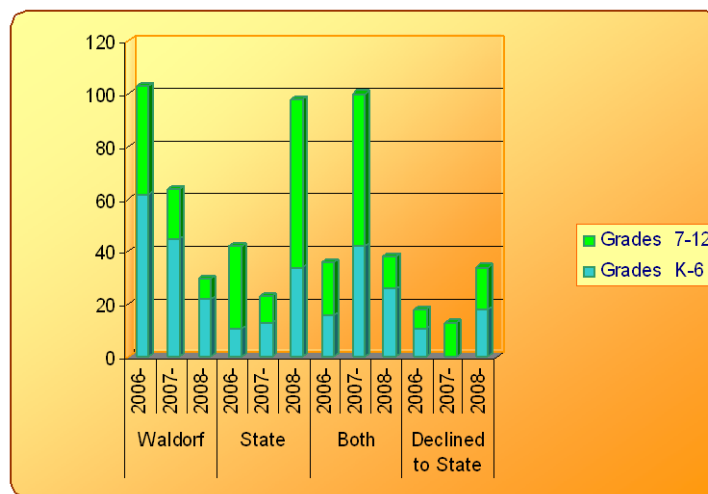
#### A Shift in Thought

A significant trend is developing in the school culture. Parents are less interested in following the Waldorf Education standards sequence than in the past. In 2008-2009, less than half (48%, 42%) of the elementary and middle/ high school parents chose to align with the Waldorf approach compared to the year before. This is a continued downward trend from the previous 06/07 year. In 08/09, interest in the Waldorf Method was only 36% for elementary and 19% for high school, of what it had been in 06/07. The numbers may be fewer, but the families interested in Waldorf Education are no less passionate. Those who most embrace the Waldorf Approach tend to be in the primary K-3 grades.

Conversely more families are looking to follow the State Standards or at least be guided in that direction. Interest in State standards increased 160% for elementary and 640% for high school.

One could surmise that the greater openness to the state standards is reflected in the generally up ward trend in school's performance in the state's standardized tests.

#### Trends in Parents Choice of Waldorf or State Standards



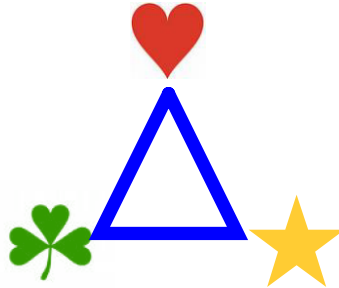
#### Three Years of Data of Standards Choice Form

Grades	Waldorf			State			Both			Declined to State		
	06-07	07-08	08-09	06-07	07-08	08-09	06-07	07-08	08-09	06-07	07-08	08-09
<b>K-6</b>	62%	45%	22%	11%	13%	34%	16%	42%	26%	11%	0%	18%
<b>7-12</b>	41%	19%	8%	31%	10%	64%	20%	58%	12%	7%	13%	16%

# Tracing the Life Force in Learning

2008-2009

## Triangulated Assessment



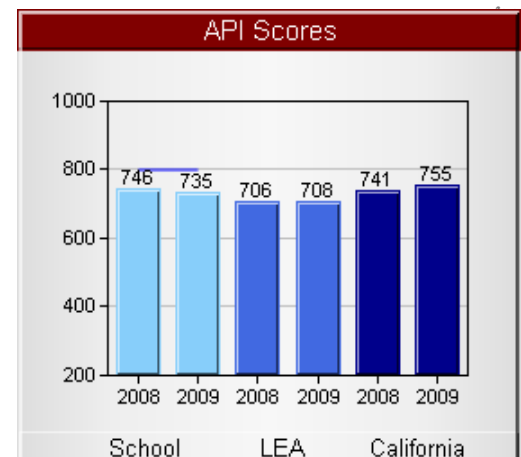
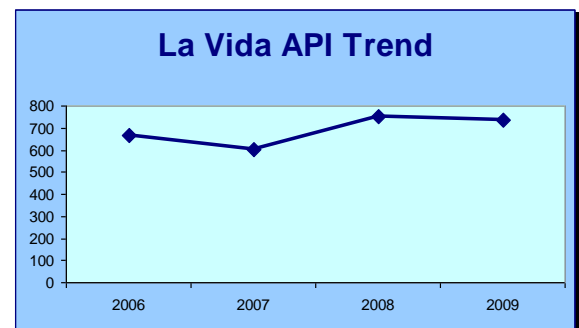
La Vida Charter School measures student progress through a three prong approach, 1) the MAP, a formative assessment, 2) the STAR the state's summative test and 3) a school created self assessment and portfolio. Thanks to the Dell Foundation and the California Charter School Association, La Vida has benefited from the Zoom Data program under Data Director, an excellent data tracking and reporting system. Many Data Director charts are included below which illustrate disaggregated data clearly for the first time. The school will now be able to more efficiently respond and support student's educational needs through the information received from the Zoom and MAP reports.

All three assessments were attended by a healthy participation rate, however there were fewer students overall because of lower enrollment. Less than 10 students tested in each grade which causes a higher standard of error and makes data less reliable than in large pool.

### ★ API, Academic Performance Index

The Spring 09 API score is 735, off from the state's expected base by 11 points. Even though down is not the preferred direction, the overall trend for the school since its first API in 2006 is up. The overall increase since 2006 is 70 points, an average of 23 points per year, which is higher than the expected growth rate of approximately eight (8) points per year. Additionally, the charter school administration is comfortable with the score for three reasons:

— Statewide Performance Target for Schools = API of 800 or Above



First, it was anticipated that there would be a negative adjustment after the previous year's dramatic upward spike of 149 points. In a small school, a good or bad day for one student has a significant out come on the school's overall score.

Second, as a K-12 school, La Vida's rating as a Small Elementary and Small High School has been fluctuating from year to year. The school was rated as a Small High School in 2008 for the first time which contributed to the big score increase. As explained by an API technician:

*High Schools, especially small High Schools have greater handicaps so that the scores are calculated differently than Small Elementary, which comprise the highest scoring group of schools. The number of CAHSEE tests are part of the calculation. In 2008 about 10 more students took the CAHSEE than in 2009. The school can not request which group to be measured in, it is a determination made by the state. In 2009, La Vida was rated as a Small Elementary school.*

Thirdly, the upward shift from far below basic and below basic to basic is another area of bonus points in the API calculation. This occurred to a greater extent between Spring 07 to Spring 08. In Spring 09 more students achieved basic, proficient and advanced which don't get the bonus. However a few more were counted in the far below basic and below basic areas which is a negative. These were new students, not students slipping backward.

### School Ranking

API Rank	2006	2007	2008
Statewide		1 *	7 *
Similar Schools		N/A	N/A



### AYP, Adequate Yearly Progress

The school met three of the four criteria for the federal accountability. Participation rate, percent proficient and API indicator were all satisfied. The graduation rate was not, so the school did not meet AYP. Because of the very small numbers and the culture surrounding independent study, the graduation rate, as it is currently measured, will be an ongoing challenge. Independent study is a last attempt for certain students to stay in high school. La Vida has a three strikes policy for missing work. It happens that the school will dis-enroll a student for non compliance and the student never re-enrolls in a district school and becomes a drop out. That drop out will count against the school for several years depending on the grade when they left. It only takes one drop out for La Vida to receive a negative rating and therefore not receive the AYP. Last spring, one student did not re-enroll after he was dis-enrolled from La Vida. He was a 10<sup>th</sup> grader and will negatively effect the graduation rate for the next three years.



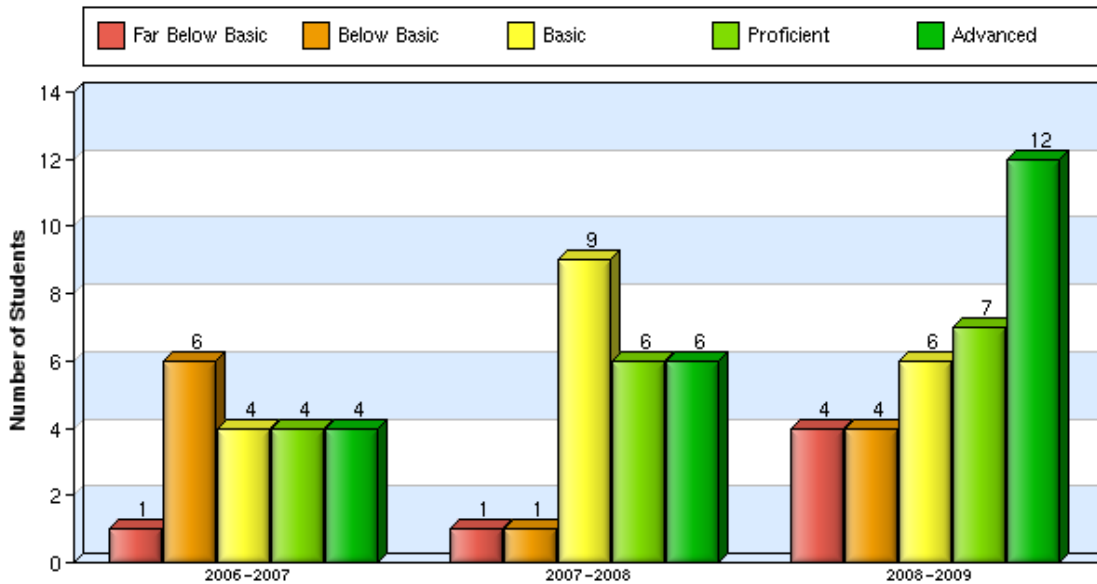
## The STAR Test Results: CST, California Standards Test

Of the 41 students tested, 20 or half were tested two years in a row. Only 10 or 25% have tested at the charter school for three years.

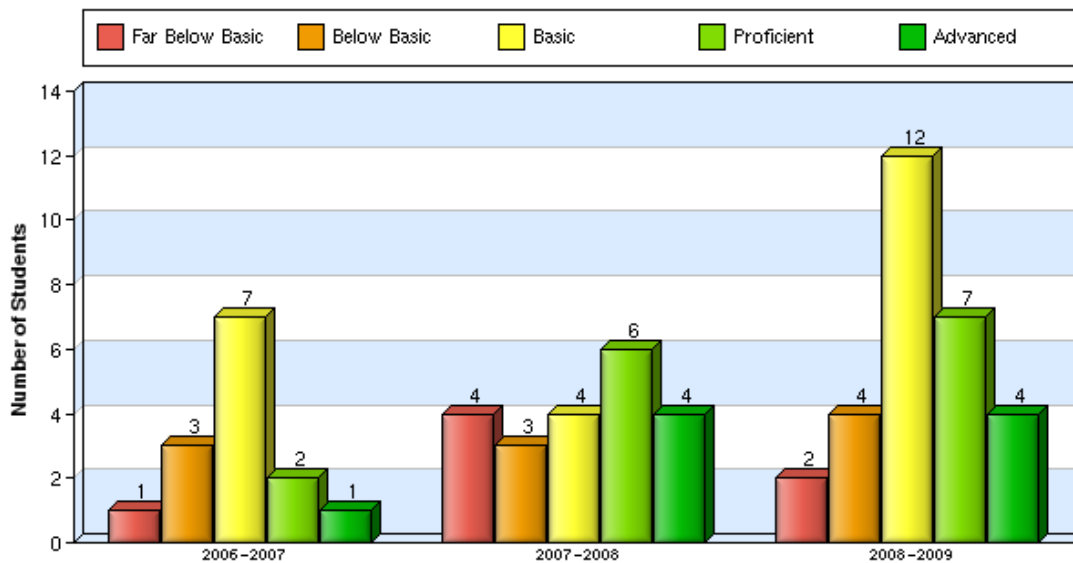
**Analysis-** The following four bar charts are three year comparisons of four subject areas, Language Arts, Math, History and Science. The school has been working on the improvement of math skills for the last several years and it is demonstrated in the chart. However there is much more to be accomplished. Next the school is concerned with a weakness in writing, especially writing strategies, which can be seen here in the increase of low end scores. However this is more than offset by an increase of advanced scores. History is another area of concern. A number of students are not getting it. Upon a closer look, those students are in modified curriculum which is not standards aligned. Still, the over all trend in History shows improvement. The few students who took the Science test did well and the three year comparison shows improvement. Overall the 09 year looks better than the two previous years.

Percent not meeting standards or not proficient: 42.42% in Language Arts; 62.07% in Math; 68.86% in History and 14.29% in Science.

### California Standards Test (CST) Three Year Comparison, English Language Arts

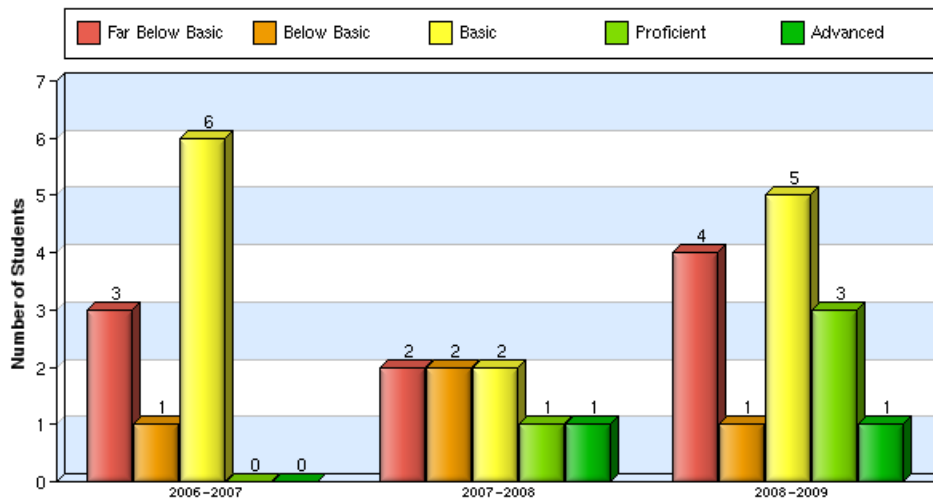


### California Standards Test (CST) Three Year Comparison, Math

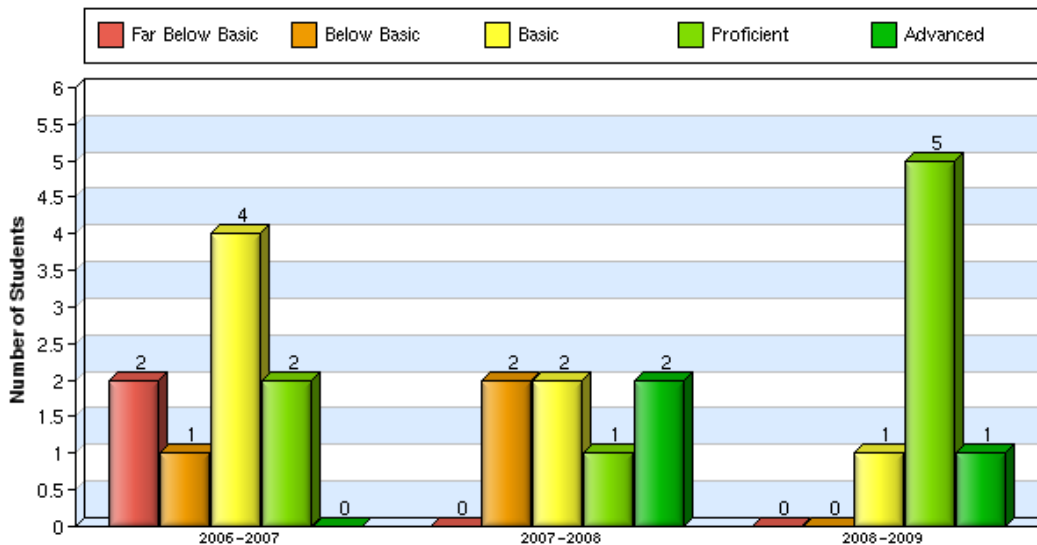


83% of eligible students tested in math in 08-09.

### California Standards Test (CST) Three Year Comparison, History



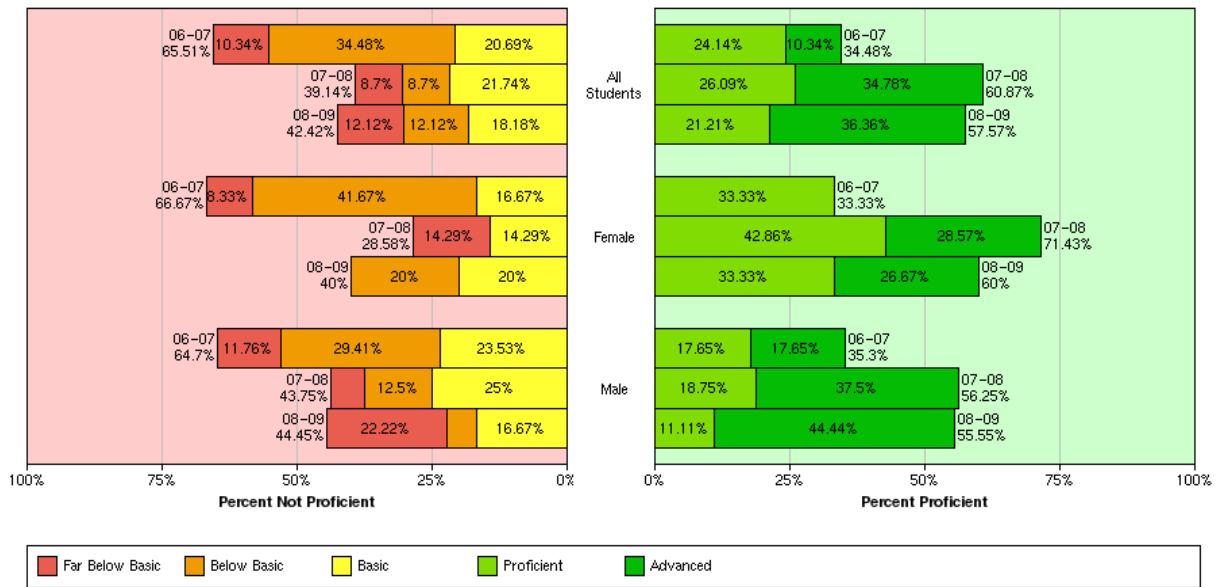
### California Standards Test (CST) Three Year Comparison, Science



**Analysis on Gender Sub-group-** The next four charts again show the four subject areas over the past three years with a break down by gender. In this arrangement it is easier to see the higher percentages of the 07/08 year that are not so apparent in the above charts. In Language Arts the performance of male and female students was about the same. Girls tended to more in the middle ground and boys at the extremes. The break down is similar in Math, however girls scored about 10% higher. History looks problematic with 50% of the girls at far below basic. The boys scored higher in the proficient and advanced by 34%. All performed well in science with 100% if the girls scoring proficient, 20% higher than boys.

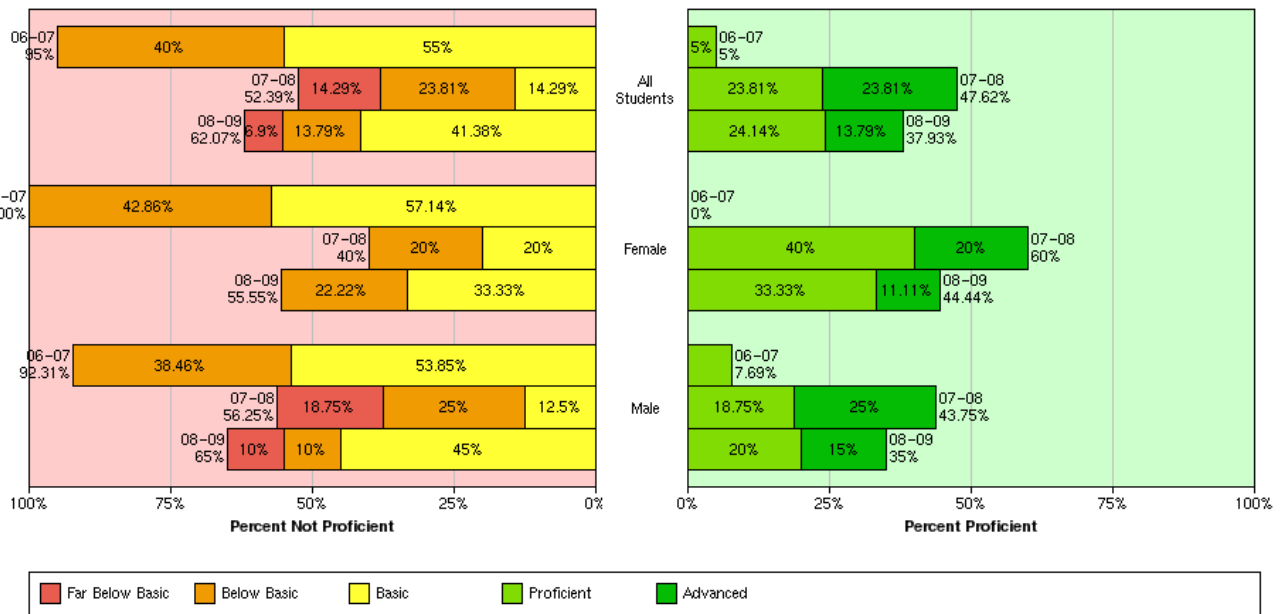
## Multi-year Comparison, CST English Language Arts Showing Gender Sub-group

Trend Analysis Graph

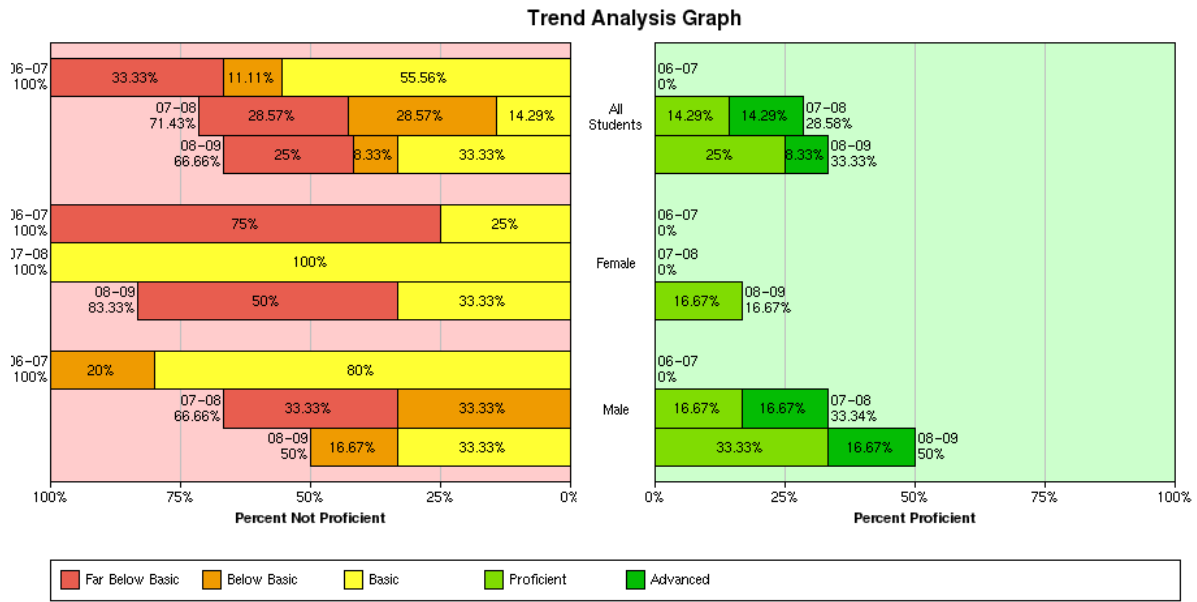


## Multi-year Comparison of CST Math Scores Showing Gender Sub-group

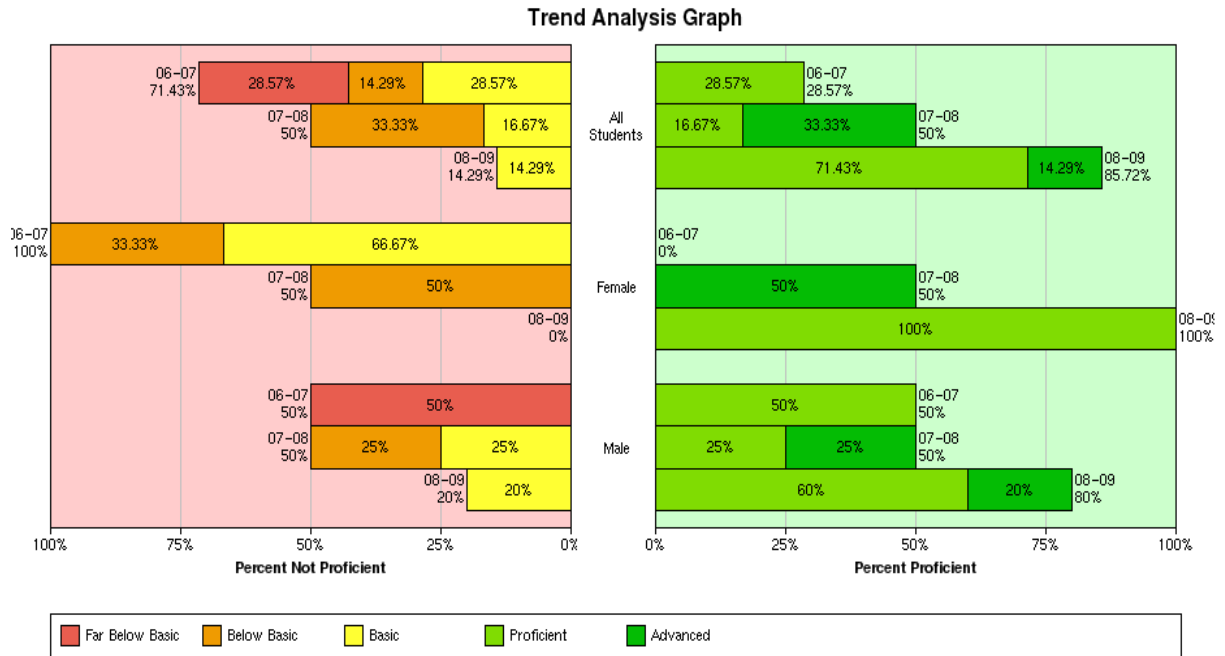
Trend Analysis Graph



## Multi-year Comparison, CST History Showing Gender Sub-group



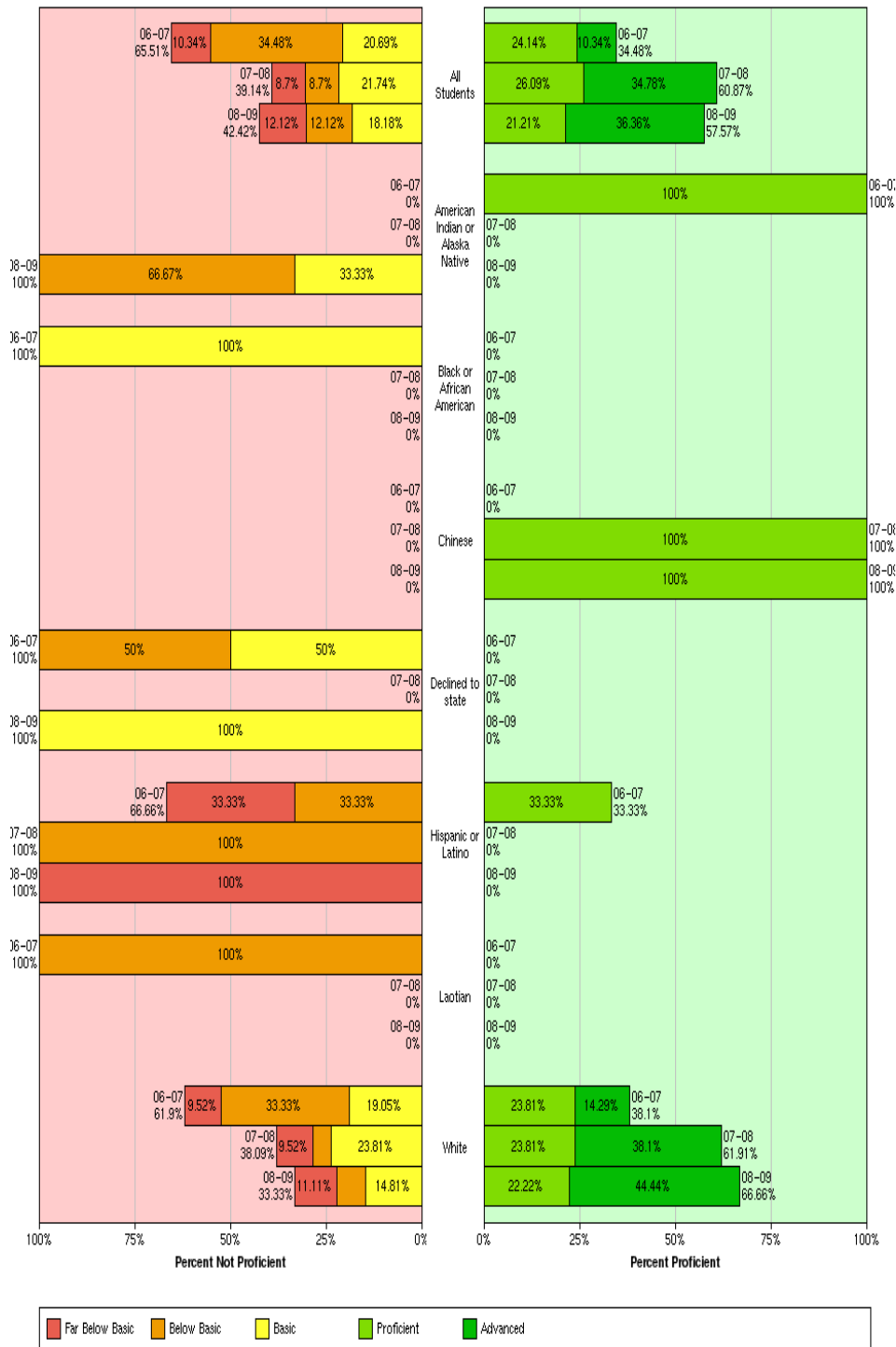
## Multi-Year Comparison, Science, Showing Gender



**Analysis on the Ethnicity Sub-group-** Here following, only Language Arts and Math are shown. Minority ethnicities are scoring below proficient except for the students of Chinese decent who achieved proficient in both subject areas. The lowest scores were held by Hispanic and White students in 2009. Each of these students would perform better if their attendance was regular.

**Multi-year Comparison CST, English Language Arts Showing Ethnicity**

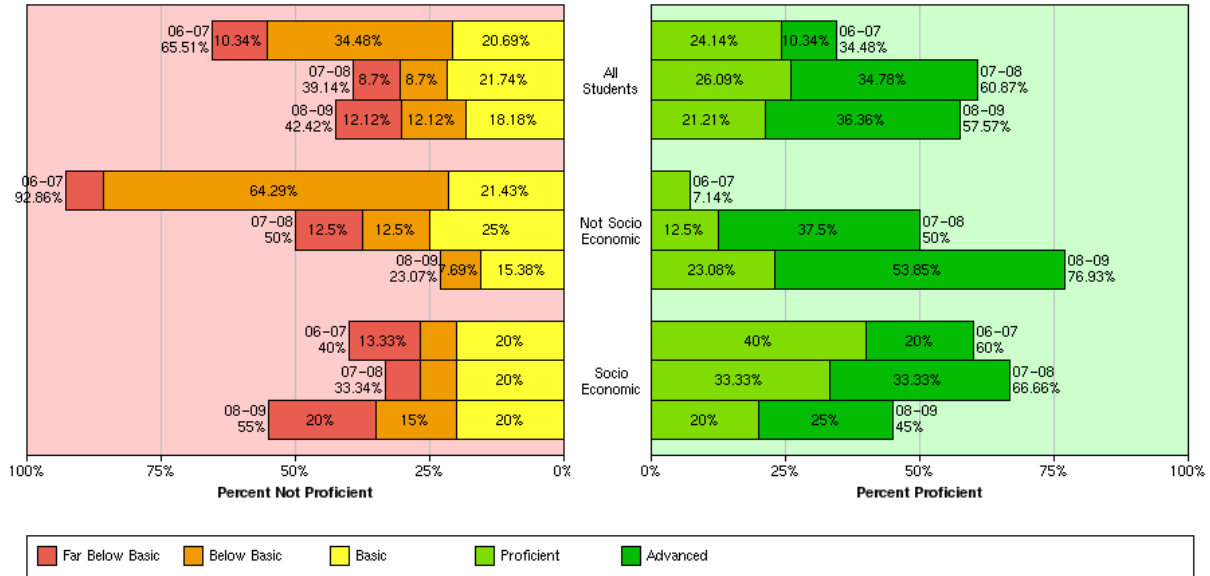
Trend Analysis Graph





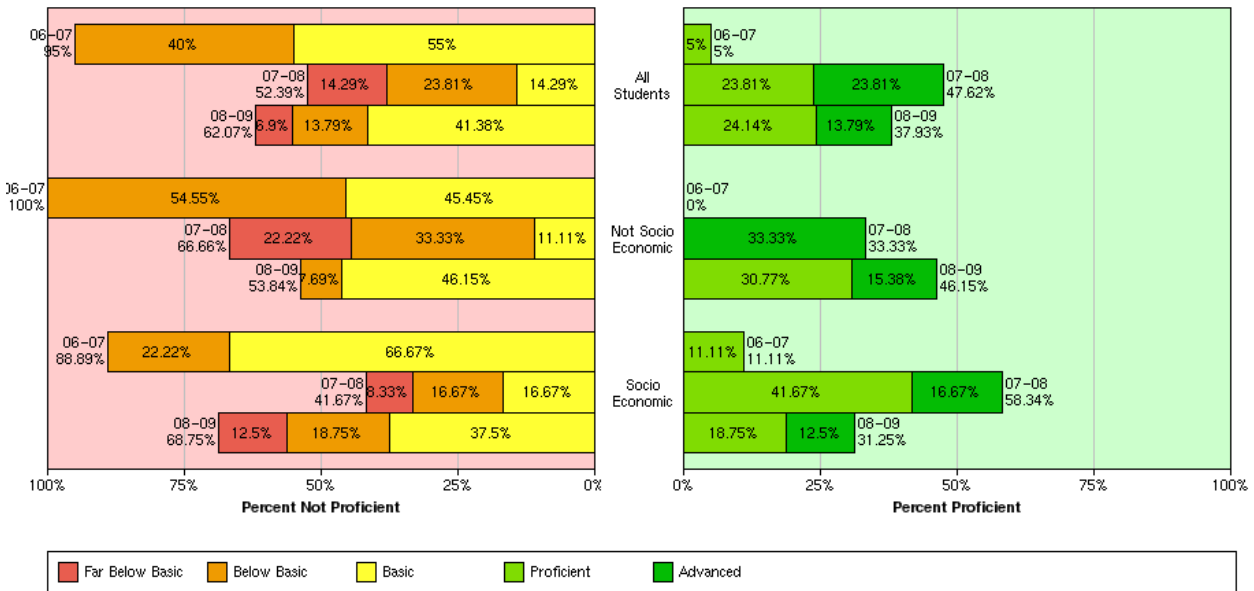
## Multi-year Comparison, CST English Language Arts Showing Socio-Economic Sub-group

Trend Analysis Graph



## Multi-year Comparison, CST Math Showing Socio-Economic Sub-group

Trend Analysis Graph



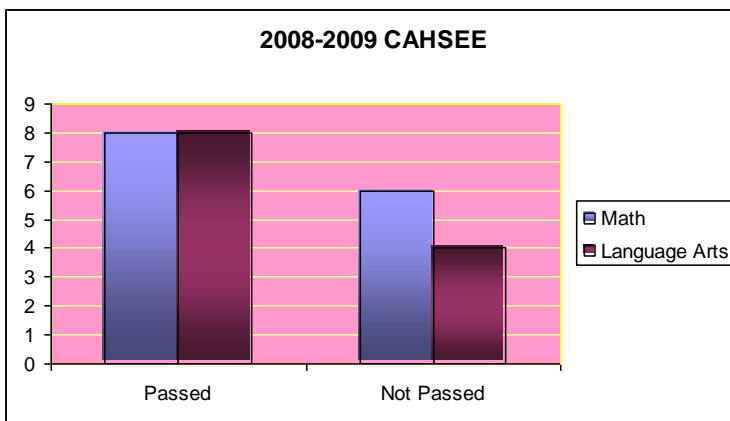


## CAHSEE, California High School Exit Exam

The charter school made incremental progress toward its goal to match the state's pass rate on the Exit Exam by ramping up the focus on math. A new high school math program was begun in Fall 2008 in an effort to support low achieving students pass the High School Exit Exam. Consultant Jeff Simpson was hired to teach his Mastery Learning System for 90 minutes on Tuesdays. The course was required for any high school student who had not passed the CAHSEE. This was the first time the charter school has ever required non-classroom based independent study students to attend a class. Counted as a success, all students who attended the CAHSEE prep class regularly, passed. Those who were absent failed.

Incentive awards in the form of iTunes cards were also presented to students who improved their score and/ or passed. All seven (7) students who retook either portion of the test improved their score on the average of 16 points. Pizza was also enjoyed by all those who filled out the CAHSEE Self Assessment. See below for the students' responses regarding attitude, effort and preparation.

Looking ahead, the school will add a CAHSEE prep writing class in 2009-2010 required for all those students yet to pass the Language Arts portion.



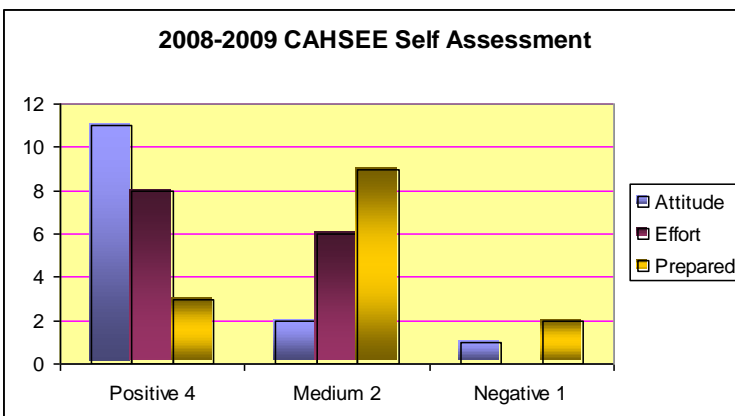
14 students took the Math portion, 8 passed (57%) and 6 did not pass.

12 took the Language Arts test, 8 passed (67%) and 4 did not.

Most of the students recorded a positive attitude about the test.

Most felt they tried their best, rechecked their work and used most of the available time.

Students felt fairly well prepared. Only a few felt very positive and very negative.





## More High School Data

**Number of students enrolled in A-G classes and Algebra:** Currently out of 35 high school students, 15 or 43% are enrolled in a-g classes.

**Algebra:** Only four, 4, or 16% are taking Algebra, however only six, 6 math students, or 17% are enrolled in a standards based math curriculum and eight, 8, or 23% are using a modified curriculum. Of the six, 6, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, only one, 1, is in a standards based algebra, one is advanced to geometry, and four, 4, are in pre-algebra.

**Number of Students who had D's and F's on Report Cards:** Last year in 2008-09, out the 18 who received report cards, 22% received D's or F's in at least one class, but no more than three classes.

### Graduation and Dropout Rates

Indicator	School			District			State		
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Dropout Rate (1-year)		13.3	24.3	0.9	3.5	4.8	3.5	4.4	3.9
Graduation Rate	100.0	80.0	U11	95.0	88.1	84.0	83.4	80.6	80.2

The state's formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Graduates (Year 4)}}{\text{Number of Graduates (Year 4) + Gr. 9 Dropouts (Year 1) + Gr. 10 Dropouts (Year 2) + Gr. 11 Dropouts (Year 3) + Gr. 12 Dropouts (Year 4)}}$$

In the state's Data Quest the information is not in yet for 08-09. Based on the number of 12<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled last year and graduated the number is 82%. with the dropout rate of 18% The school's goal for the graduation rate is whatever the state's rate is 80.2% currently which was achieved. However, the school did not stay within the dropout rate goal of 10%.

**Number of enrolling 9<sup>th</sup> graders,2, and number of exiting 12<sup>th</sup> graders,8, in 2008-2009.**

## Post Enrollment Data

La Vida students are usually bound for Mendocino Community College, vocational schools or right into the work force. Students rarely expect to enroll into a university directly from high school. Therefore it is rare that we have SAT or ACT data. We don't have hard data. However we ask graduates to check in around June each year, and let us know what they are doing.



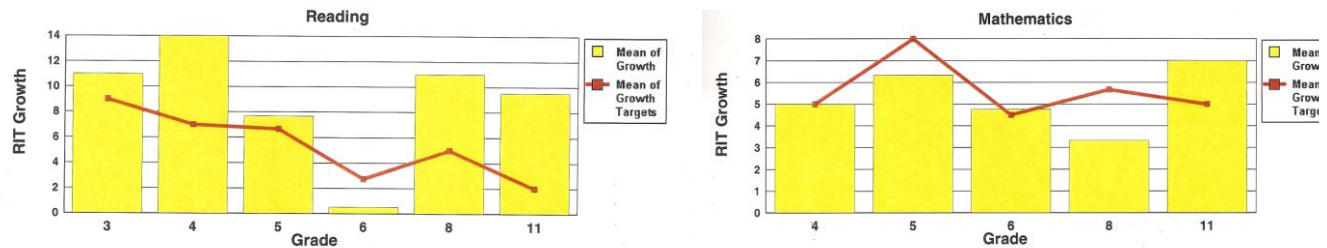
La Vida's Class of 2009 at Board interview night. The interview is part of graduation requirements.

From left to right: Future Veterinarian; future Contractor; future Early Education Specialist; future Teacher; future Animator; future Chef.



## The MAP Test, Measures of Academic Progress

### Student Growth- Summary, Spring 08 to Spring 09



La Vida is a member of the North West Evaluation Association, NWEA, and conducts the MAP test in the Fall and Spring. Parents who are adamantly against the STAR, have the MAP test. The MAP is recognized by the state as an alternative to STAR. Of the 53 students who were eligible to take the MAP or STAR, 51 were tested, 96%. 21 took the MAP Reading and 14 Math.

The MAP has a focus on growth and projected proficiency level. As a formative test, it is accompanied by a large educational component that maps out what the student already knows, what the student is learning and what to introduce next.

The above Student Growth Summary Report, summarizes by grade the term to term growth of the students. The red line, the Mean Growth Target, is the average of the individual student growth targets. Individual growth targets are defined as the average amount of RIT growth observed for students in the latest NWEA norming study who started the year with the same RIT score as the individual student.. The yellow bars are the Mean of Growth which is the average change in RIT scores from the starting term to ending term (ending RIT minus the starting RIT). The RIT or Rasch Unit named for a Danish mathematician, is related to a curriculum scale where each number is directly related to the difficulty of the item, which is a constant. The RIT scale has the same meaning regardless of grade level.

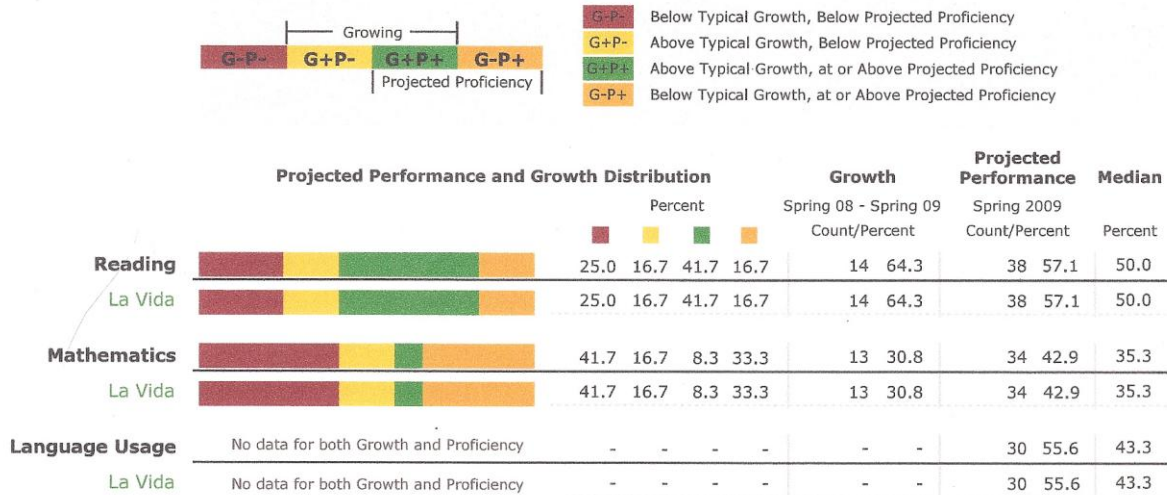
**Analysis-** On the Reading Test students showed strong growth well beyond the norm for the most part except for grade 6. The anomaly here was caused by some loud and prolonged disturbance during this test. Staff had hoped to re- offer the test but never did.

The Math summary shows students barely to not quite meeting the norm reference targets. Growth is occurring but well below the expected rate. In this case students did not perform as well on the MAP as they did on the STAR.

The charts on the next page illustrate growth and proficiency. Yellow and green and growing, green and orange are proficient. In the first Spring 08 to Spring 09 chart, 58% of the students are proficient and the same number 58% are growing. In Math only 41.6 % are proficient and 25% are growing. 41% are not proficient and not growing. This information is important focus material at weekly staff meeting. What will engage the student and keep them moving to the next level?



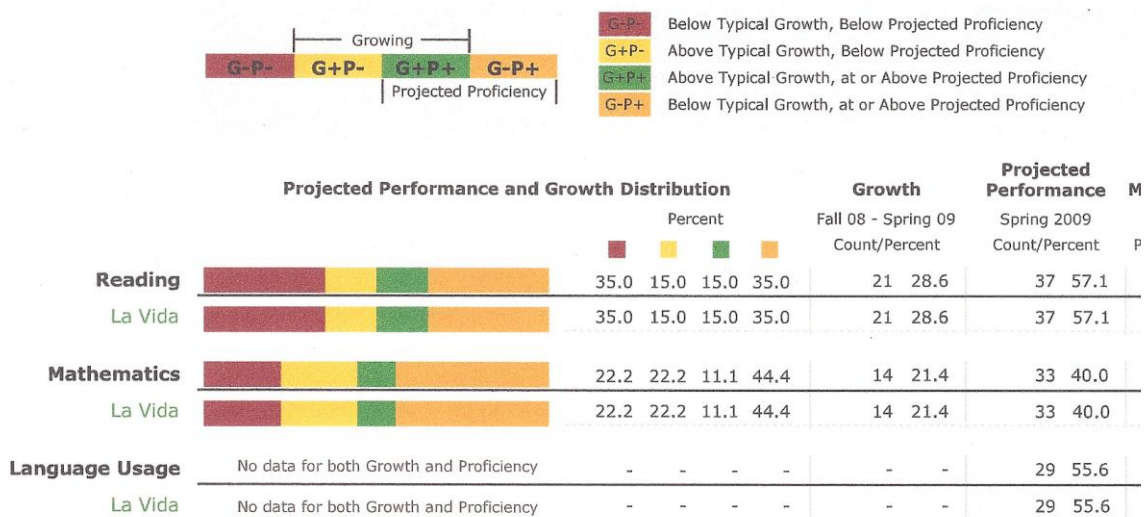
## Growth analysis for Spring 08 to Spring 09, the same time frame as CST STAR test



The next chart shows a slightly different picture. This is a snapshot of the year from fall to spring. In Reading 50% are showing proficiency, 30% are growing and 35% are neither proficient nor growing. These students are the first group to look at more closely.

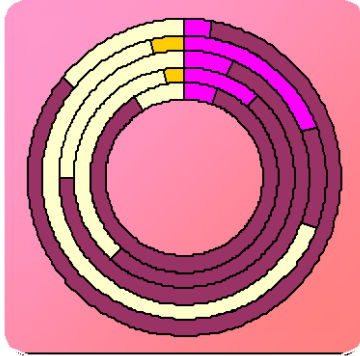
In Math, 55.5% are showing proficient, 33% are growing and 22% are not. On the STAR, 57% were proficient, 27% were in the basic/ proficient range and 28% were in the far and below basic levels. These scores from the two diverse tests show remarkable similarities.

## Students who Tested in both Fall and Spring sessions during the 2008-2009 year





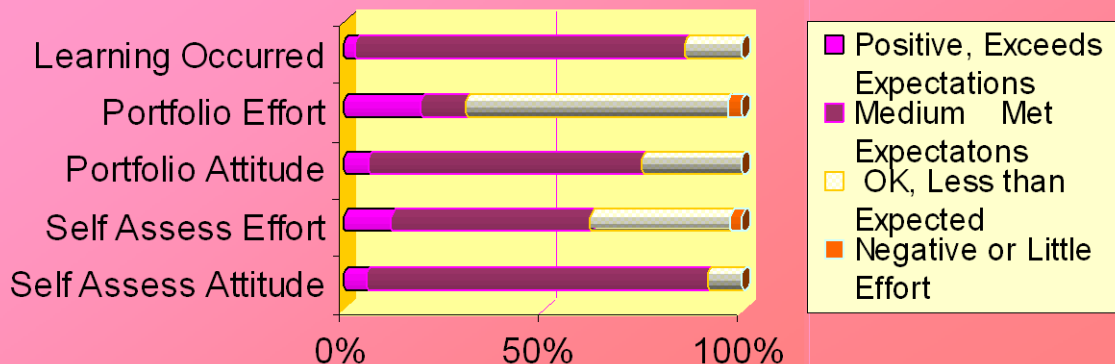
## La Vida Charter School Student Self- Assessment and Portfolio



The student Self Assessment and Portfolio, the third element of the school-wide triangulated assessment occurs at the end of the year. 70% (41) of the students turned in a completed self assessment. The questions were designed with input from parents and teachers several years ago. They ask the students to reflect on their learning for the year and elaborate on the learning process, successes and challenges.

**Analysis-** The majority of students had a generally positive attitude toward their leaning year and showed interest in what they accomplished. The area of effort had greater room for improvement. Students in general did not engage in the portfolio experience and did the minimum to fulfill the assignment.

### 2008-2009 Student Self Assessment



## Process and Perception Data

La Vida had four surveys to work with. Two were from the end of the 2008-2009 school year; the Parent Satisfaction Survey and the Student Satisfaction Survey. For the WASC self study process two surveys were conducted; the Focus on Education survey which the board, staff and parents completed; and the High School Focus on Education.

### Parent Satisfaction Survey

The school achieved a greater sampling this year with a return rate of 36% up from 19%. The survey questions were refined to get a better idea of what parents were feeling and further investigate areas of interest for La Vida. The first section is included here and only a summary of the second section since it is lengthy. The entire first section are included in the appendix.

The goal is on overall rating of 8 which was achieved at 8.3 up from 7.43 the previous year.

1. I feel adequately informed about my child's academic & social progress. 8.6
2. My child has made adequate progress this year. 8.5
3. I feel satisfied with the support and communication with my EC. 8.1
4. I feel responsive to my needs that La Vida teachers and staff are. 8.4
5. My children are challenged at La Vida. 8.2
6. I am satisfied with the curriculum options available at La Vida. 7.9
7. La Vida's social environment is positive and supportive. 8.4
8. My overall rating of the school is... 8.6

9. In what ways can the on-site classes be improved?	10. What information would be helpful to you as a parent educators?	11. What field trips would you like to be offered?	12. How has your child's well-being & performance changed since they enrolled?	13. Why did you choose La Vida Charter School?
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**Analysis:** Overall the parents' responses are relatively consistent year to year. Parents are generally happy with the staff and school. Some would like more teaching support and materials such as parent training and teaching methods. Some critiqued certain classes.

Off site experiences and experiential learning was encouraged. Communications around expectations and student progress could improve and some would prefer more curriculum

options, newer items and larger supply budgets. Very positive feedback was received about how the school was less stressful for their student and they enjoyed the on-site program. Families chose La Vida through word of mouth that the school helped fulfill children's emotional needs.

## Student Satisfaction Survey

The questions here are trying to capture what the students liked best and how those qualities could be applied to other classes. 45% (32/71) of the surveys were returned, up from 10% in the previous year. The questions were:

1. In looking back over the school year, what was your favorite experience?
2. What about the experience could be duplicated or done in another class?
3. Describe one of your favorite lessons by one of your teachers. What made it special?
4. When did you feel most proud of your accomplishments this year?
5. What would make La Vida a better school?

The trend in students responses was that students enjoy the integrated, experiential learning in the on -site program and want more of it in every way. They want more hands on experiences and kinesthetic learning, more integrated classes and core classes integrated with art & music, more project based learning, and more combined art and science curriculum.

## Focus on Learning: School Community Survey:

1. What do you feel the top three (3) things students should be able to accomplish upon exit from school?
2. What does it mean to be an educated person (socially, academically, what skills should they possess)?
3. What is the most effective preparation of students for their future (in terms of: organization, core knowledge, responsibility)?
4. Do you use the CA State Content Standards?
5. How familiar are you with your student's relevant grade-level standards? (Check one of the boxes below)  
↑ Not Aware      ↑ Aware      ↑ Use Some      ↑ Very knowledgeable
6. Do you feel a Standards-based curriculum will adequately prepare your child/student for the future? Please explain.
7. What do you feel is a valuable assessment, and why?

Adults wanted students to be able to function successfully in the real world, be good citizens and have appropriate social skills. They wanted their students to have the compassion, awareness and be capable and contribute to society with their skills. They felt it was important for students to have good habits, be self-motivated, have communication skills, and be prepared for life in general.

Most adults were aware of the standards. However most didn't think the standards were working. Most of the school community did not value testing as an assessment method.

### High School Focus on Learning Survey:

1. If you could design your own school, your Dream School, what would it contain? What would you learn, what kind of teachers, how much time would be dedicated, what would it look like, would it be in one place or many, what would a day be like? (Use the other side if necessary)
2. What do you feel the top three (3) things you should be able to accomplish? upon graduation from school?
3. What can La Vida do now to help you reach your goals for the future?
4. What are your goals?
5. How familiar are you with the California State Content Standards for your grade level?  
Not Aware    Aware    Familiar    Very Knowledgeable

High school students imagined their dreams school as a spacious facility with an artsy elective driven program. Upon exiting high school, they wanted to know how to get a job and how to get into college. Their goals were to be happy and get into college. The school could help them by getting them to pass requirements and get a high school diploma. The majority of the students are at least aware of the standards and a little less than half were familiar and knowledgeable.

## 2. Analysis of Data

**LA VIDA CHARTER SCHOOL**

January, 2010  
WASC Leadership Committee

## 2. ANALYSIS OF DATA

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The following is a comprehensive analysis of La Vida Charter School data described in Chapter 1. The summary below is organized by areas of strength and areas of need.

### Areas of Strength

- **Adaptive Organization:** the charter school is able to expand and contract with changes of enrollment and financial revenues within the year and from year to year.
- **School Environment Emotionally Safe:** school perception data reveals that students and parents feel comfortable and safe which is fundamental for long term cognitive growth. Students maintain generally respectful behavior as indicated by zero suspensions and expulsions.
- Serves a wide geographic area, the county and beyond The school serves a need for alternative education in the county.
- Demographically families are becoming more middle class (40%) and educated 81% some college or degrees (one-third have degrees)
- Families becoming more aware and interested in state content standards. Parents are beginning to understand California's agenda for education. Also teachers have been educating parents about standards which is beginning have an impact.
- On going professional development.: Besides annual and monthly trainings, faculty has opportunities to work with mentors.
- 100% of core faculty meet highly qualified compliance with NCLB. 36% of core teachers have been at school for five or more years. 45% have been there for three to five years.
- Triangulated Assessment model: Assessment model reflective of community and the states values. Student growth is measured and demonstrated in a variety of ways.
- Program and Process Structures in place: The school has been working to accommodate the community values as well as California's Department of Education by investing and implementing data gathering systems to become a data driven program.
- NWEA's the MAP, a computer based alternative standardized assessment is offered twice a year and ZOOM Data or Data Director for charter schools is being used at the school
- 95.3% Attendance Rate, and met the goal of 95%
- API upward trend up 70 points over the past three years.
- State Ranking up from 1 to 7
- AYP consistently meet 3 out of 4 criteria (but not graduation rate)
- Graduation rate, based on 08-09 enrollment, was at the state rate of 80% which is the school's goal.

- Scores improving on statewide assessment in **four** core areas.
- Girls doing slightly better than boys.
- In Language Arts growth is evident from below basic to proficient/ advanced.
- Proficiency rate for Science is 85.72% (girls 100% proficient, 20% higher than boys)

### Areas of Need

- Retention of population: Although the school serves a need for the county for an educational alternative, the high mobility rate compromises the accomplishment and measurement of longitudinal improvement. Only 10 students (about one-third) tested the CST for three years in a row. This is not an uncommon rate for La Vida.
- The school's fluctuation between the designation as a "small elementary" and "small high school" by the state skews year to year API school score and compounds the already unreliable quality of the school wide outcomes because of the small enrollment numbers, often less than 5 being tested in a grade.
- The school would better serve the county population by having more ethnic diversity reflective of the area. In 2008-2009 the school only had 12% Hispanic and Native American students whereas the county has 21.24% of those ethnicities added together.
- Virtually all minority students (except Chinese) are performing in the far below basic to basic range (not proficient) in Language Arts and Mathematics.
- Socio-economically disadvantaged (SED) students were less proficient than non disadvantaged students. SED students were 55% in far below to basic in Language Arts and 68.75% below proficient in Math.
- Although students are making incremental progress on the CAHSEE, in that scores improved an average of 16 points for all students attending the remedial math prep class. The pass rate is quite insufficient 57% for Math and 67% for Language Arts, Students need to be better prepared for the CAHSEE content and testing skills to insure success.
- Although there is room for growth in Language Arts, only 57.57% proficient, the areas of Math and History have significantly lower proficiency rates, 37.93% and 33.33% respectively. In Math girls performed 10% higher than boys; but in History girls were 50% lower.
- The school is supporting a population with about 25% special needs (13% have IEPs).
- Improvement for students in Special Ed is one of the sub groups for the API that has been met consistently. The implications are that the school needs to have adequate personnel, and curriculum to support and scaffold the learning disabled students to school achievement.
- For the past three years, the small number of dropouts of an academically fragile high school population has negatively impacted the graduation rate in a significant way,. The school has not been able to achieve a positive AYP because of not meeting the graduation rate.

### *Implications*

Based on the overall analysis of the areas of needs the following sum up the implications of the findings.

1. For greater population equilibrium, there is a need to retain more students for two or more years in order to see measurable growth and stabilize the school wide ratings.
2. The school also needs to creatively support academically fragile students in danger of dropping out, to accomplish student and school success.
3. There is a need to continue to improve student learning in Language Arts for all students and reduce the achievement gap between the school's white students and the subgroups of minority ethnicities, socio-economically disadvantaged students (SED), and students with disabilities (Special Ed.)
4. There is a need to build interest and skills and to continue to improve student learning in Mathematics for all students and reduce the achievement gap between the school's white students and the subgroups of minority ethnicities, socio-economically disadvantaged students (SED), and students with disabilities (Special Ed.)
5. There is a need to build interest and skills and to continue to improve student learning in History for all students and reduce the achievement gap between the school's white students and the subgroups of minority ethnicities, socio-economically disadvantaged students (SED), and students with disabilities (Special Ed.)
6. There is a need to support, build test taking skills and improve student learning for the California High School Exit Exam, CAHSEE, a requirement for graduation.

### **Critical Academic Needs**

After studying the data there was unanimous agreement within the stakeholders that the critical areas for improvement were in three areas; Mathematics, History and the CAHSEE.

The school has been already focused on Math and CAHSEE, but the data regarding History made it clear that it is another area of critical need. Through the self- study process regarding curriculum and instruction these areas will be examined more closely and an action plan will be developed in chapter 5.

The mobility/ retention rate is another area of concern expressed by all members of the community. It will be studied further with strategies developed and pursued.

The following are some of the questions that arose in studying the data and reflecting on the implications.

1. In high school, how can the school incorporate more kinesthetic Waldorf approaches to engage students? (Some students feel they regurgitate information too much?)
2. How do we develop interests in History to help students grasp what they are learning?
3. Are the students taking History courses in synch with the CST testing schedule?
4. What test readiness programs could be implemented? Consider both web based and paper and pencil.
5. Are students understanding their work/. Are they spending more time in other areas of study and not giving enough attention to problem areas and not going for mastery? Do students test properly?
6. How can we ensure that students are taking full advantage of what the school offers, tutoring, special work sessions.
7. How can the school be supportive of the students, especially in grades 9-12, needing math help throughout the week, after they leave class?
8. With high mobility, how meaningful are the year to year data of the population?
9. What program elements will help attract High School students to remain enrolled longer .
10. Given the limited contact hours the students have with the school, what policies or procedures would have the greatest impact on student learning?
11. How does transportation factor into the equation for learning success?

# 3. Progress Report

**LA VIDA CHARTER SCHOOL**

January, 2010  
WASC Leadership Committee

### 3. Progress Report

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This self study is La Vida Charter School's first full self study. The school received candidacy in May/June 2007. Four areas were identified as Major Areas of Need; Curriculum, Achievement Accountability, Retention of Students and Technology. A progress report was submitted the following year, some of which is restated here.

#### **Curriculum:**

The school was wanting to provide more options, in particular a standards based option for K-5. The curriculum committee did a year long study in 06-07. After working with other independent study charter schools, Core Knowledge was chosen and piloted with families who liked it at first, but lost interest. As per the website Core Knowledge is "an educational reform based on the premise that a grade-by-grade core of common learning is necessary to ensure a sound and fair elementary education"

California standards aligned supplements entitled Buckle Down and Science Assessment, both from the same publisher, were offered to every student. The curriculum committee's goal was that everyone from grade 3 up would have a California standards review workbook in math and science and any other subject upon request. Many did not use the books, but others did and the school believes there was a positive effect on test scores from the exposure to the texts. Spring 08 was the year the La Vida API jumped 149 points after the year the scores dropped 60 points in 07. Families started to come on board with realizing the importance of the standards from the state's perspective and were willing to give the approach a try to see if their children benefited.

The school believes that another strategically placed curriculum support also had a positive impact on the API that year. After analyzing the MAP test results focusing on the goal strands, the school identified for each student what target strand needed improvement in Language Arts. Using Lottery book money, the school then bought a supplement workbook through Options Publishing, targeting each student's weak area. Teachers used specialty class time during the onsite program once a week for a semester to work on the personal goals of the students. Although it is hard to quantify, the school believes the effort paid off.

Families continue to seem satisfied with the math selections from the 06-07 math adoption year. Saxon Homeschool Math is by far preferred to Sadler Oxford Progress in Math which is a California text. Other math options are still available such as Math U See, Key Curriculum Press, and Math Coach.

An annual Curriculum Fair was initiated so parents could have time to just focus on curriculum separate from the myriad details around orientation. Although not well attended it is useful for those who do take advantage of the opportunity. Allowing parents and students to actively investigate various curricula and have a concrete start at the beginning of the year. Through self study the school has found that parents do not use one curriculum consistently. The observed pattern is to start a curriculum, get bored, try a new

curriculum, get bored, go back, or try something else. In the primary grades there are hardly two families using the same curriculum.

The implementation of School Pathways Report Writer the past two years has helped settle the curriculum bouncing ball with parents. It is a wonderful computer based independent study paperwork program that handles everything from master agreements to assignments, to report cards. The company is continually updating curriculum which is over 500 items now. It is among the best curriculum lists for independent study that one can find. Parents like the detailed assignments that come with the program. If they want to use their own curriculum, they are required to create a lesson plan, or at least learning objectives, in advance for the Educational Coordinator, EC, to enter into the program in order to issue a printed assignment. Consequently the parents have become more committed to the choices they make with regards to curriculum.

### **Achievement Accountability**

The school focused and did make progress along its action plan. The curriculum supports mentioned above were part of the achievement improvement plan contributing to an impressive upward spike of 149 points.

Diagnostic tests upon entrance, especially in math have become more routine, whether it is a publisher placement test or the MAP. Students are more quickly identified as to the grade level they are working at and the type of learner they are. In this way the school can more quickly match the student with appropriate curriculum to support their growth and personalized learning.

Lots of work around using the MAP test to greater efficiency has occurred with more work to come. Staff traveled to trainings, where they learned about students using the MAP scores to set personal goals. Staff implemented the goal setting feature and it had a positive effect. The school also put effort into parent education about the MAP. Providing reading material for parents about MAP as well as a display highlighting the importance and usefulness of this test.

Supporting low achieving students to pass the CAHSEE has become a primary focus in high school. More time, 90 minutes is dedicated to math during Tuesdays, the La Vida on-site high school day. The school invested in consultant Jeff Simpson of Mastery Learning Systems to teach the math class while two La Vida teachers assist and learn his method. More tutoring time was made available, however few students used the opportunity. Online math homework support program Teacherbot was subscribed to. The school has made it a requirement for any high school student who has not passed the CAHSEE to attend the Tuesday prep classes. A writing class was added to the on-site high school program for support of the English Language Arts portion.

La Vida has entered the age of data driven decision making in education by implementing ZOOM Data or Data Director. The charts in this report are the first foray using the software. Gifted through the Dell Foundation to the Charter School Association, CCSA, the school staff received two days of training for three staff members and access to numerous other web trainings. It is the first time the school has been able to assess subgroups and

multiyear comparisons easily. The school hopes to put all of its major assessment in the zoom data program in order to better understand the patterns and needs of students. By having a more comprehensive understanding of the students individually and communally, the school will be able to make better decisions to keep students growing.

Another technology support for the independent study teachers was implemented, Report Writer by School Pathways. This makes the whole tedious process of independent study paperwork more standard and efficient thereby allowing more time for the teacher to focus on the student rather than the paperwork. As mentioned earlier, the program outlines the curriculum and assignments in detail, so the focus is on education rather than time management. The state standards are incorporated into the program and can be viewed easily. Parents take the assignments more seriously. The program provides an important background support feature to achievement.

Lastly, the staff has made important inroads educating parents on how the California Content Standards are useful tools. There had been a boisterous group of free choice un-schooling advocates to whom “standards” was a dirty word. After many meetings, discussions and workshops, the majority of that group chose to move from the school and do private homeschooling. Since then, the families who have remained have had better buy in and interest in the state standards.

### **Retention of Students**

This is the area that the school has made little progress in changing. Rather the school is coming to understand the community better. At the initial interview in the enrollment process, the administrator asks the family why they are choosing La Vida, why they are choosing independent study and what do they hope to accomplish. Approximately 85% have a short term agenda. The two primary reasons why students attend La Vida are because students are needing A place to de-stress from various circumstances and the students need a place to catch up on their schooling. It is clear that more parents now view schools with a consumer approach, selecting the best fit for their student for the moment. Kindergarten and first grade families who have a philosophical agenda are making choices for the long term. Their success will depend on how much harmony there is between student and parent over structured learning. With the long term families, the school has noticed a five year cap. After five years most families feel they have gotten all they need from the support of the school and are ready to do their own private school. These families are well connected to homeschooling networks.

Strategies are continually sought and devised to stabilize the school’s highly mobile population. Parent support sessions have occurred almost monthly for the past two years with marginal attendance. The school is exploring other modes of communication and networking with hopes of leveraging change. More can be seen in chapter five.

### **Technology Opportunities**

It was suggested that the school pursue online curriculum and learning opportunities for K-8, as well as A-G and Advance Placement for high school. For grades 3-12 La Vida provides access to Odysseyware, a comprehensive online curriculum which includes diagnostic tests, CAHSEE prep, numerous electives and advanced math and science. Advance Placement courses are now provided separately through Aventa Learning via Oak

Meadow, our primary curriculum, however no one has ever requested a course. Teacherbot an online math tutoring program was subscribed to for two years and hardly used. Links to useful teaching websites are beginning to be rostered on the school's website [lavidaschool.org](http://lavidaschool.org). In the future, when the state's financial picture turns around, the school hopes to add other curriculum that parents highly recommend such as A Time For Learning and XLprep.

# 4. Self Study Findings

**LA VIDA CHARTER SCHOOL**

January 2010  
WASC Leadership Committee

# 4. Self Study Findings

## A. Organization

### A1: Vision and Purpose

To what extent a) does the school have a clearly stated vision or purpose based on its students needs, current educational research and the belief that all students can achieve high levels and b) is the school's purpose supported by the governing board and the central administration and further defined by expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards.

### Evidence

- MOU with District
- Waldorf Standards Choice Form
- By Laws
- Articles of Incorporation
- Brochures
- Parent and Student Handbook
- High School Handbook
- Motto: La Vida Means Life

### Vision – ESLRs-- Profile

For a charter school, the guiding light for that school is the charter document. It includes the mission and goals, philosophy, academic program, curriculum, governance, etc. The vision information is clearly stated in the charter, which has been carefully refined over the past 4 years to reflect the current offerings and program at La Vida Charter School.

(See this self study chapter 1 pp.3-4 for mission, goals and ESLRs) Element 1 of the charter contains the following fundamental topics.

- Mission
  - Goals
  - Whom the School is Attempting to Educate
  - What it Means to be an Educated Person in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:
  - How Learning Best Occurs
  - Transferability of Courses/College Entrance Requirements
  - Implementation of Educational Program
  - Curriculum
  - Plan for Students Who are Academically Low Achieving
  - Plan for Students Who are Academically High Achieving
  - Current Educational Programs
  - Plan for English Learners
  - Serving Students with Disabilities
  - Attendance Accounting
- forms numerous aspects of the La Vida program and are referenced throughout the various elements of the charter. The most influential work is

related to child centered education such as the ever evolving brain research which supports the holistic approach of Waldorf Education. Dr. Jane Healy and Dr. Bruce Perry are only two researchers who have become associated with the Waldorf Education community because of their findings working with children and doing hundreds of brain scans. Other work that has been important for the school is the work of the Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills which is reflected in the school's ESLRs; Eric Jensen's work on brain-based education; McTighe and Wiggins *Understanding by Design*, and using students prior knowledge in the Constructivist model of education. (see pp 2-4 of the charter.)

### **Development and Refinement of Vision/**

ESLRs The original La Vida Charter was developed by parents, educators and community members. The two revisions were primarily accomplished by the school leadership which includes parent representation on the board. Input to the direction comes through community meetings, faculty discussion and survey data.

In 2005-2006 the school worked with a facilitator using Appreciative Inquiry with parents and faculty, back and forth all year. Through that process which was palpably meaningful, the school leadership was able to get a deep understanding of the motivations of its homeschooling population. The fundamental qualities unveiled at that time have not changed even though many individuals have changed. With this understanding, when the WASC leadership team created the ESLRs from the charter and presented them at a community meeting of teachers and parents, they were well received. Parents were demonstrably grateful to the inclusion of real world experience as well as the development of empathy and compassion.

### **Understanding of Vision and ESLRs**

For teachers the school provides ongoing professional development that supports and communicates the school vision. The faculty works collaboratively and has opportunities to discuss and learn from each other for deeper understanding.

The Parent Student Handbook contains the core values of the school and is refined each year. Upon enrollment each year parents read and sign a page of assurances that they understand and agree to the school's vision and policies.

### **Regular Review and Revision**

As described above, the school has undergone two charter revisions in the past four years, plus two WASC self study components over the same period. The charter revision process has been deep and difficult. Not only is it important to represent and protect the interests of the school community, but it also has to satisfy the district and their legal counsel. The

La Vida school board spent \$30,000 on legal counsel in the transition from Ukiah to Willits Unified to satisfy their concerns and demands.

Embedded into the routine of the year are parent gatherings and surveys in which the current concerns and desires of parents and students are communicated. This is important input for the leadership when creating new class schedules and activity plans for the next year.

## **A2: Governance:**

*To what extent does the governing board a) have policies and bylaws that are aligned with the school's purpose and support the achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards based on data –driven instructional decisions for the school; b) delegate implementation of these policies to the profession staff; and*

*c) regularly monitor results and approve the single schoolwide action plan and its relationship to the Local Educational Association (LEA) plan?*

## **Evidence**

- End of Year Report
- Charter Matrix with District
- submit monthly reports to Willits
- Monitor APR from the state
- Use MAP & ZOOM DATA

## **Governing Board**

In depth governing board meetings do ensure adequate time to accomplish the items listed in the question. The board president acknowledges that the school Director does an excellent job of tracking, recommending and implementing the listed necessities to running an effective charter school.

Policies surrounding the governing board are detailed in the Charter pp 36-38, the Bylaws pp1-11; and the Memorandum of Understanding, MOU, with Willits Unified School District pp 6-7, 20. The annual meeting schedule for the following year is reported to Willits in December as stipulated in the MOU.

## **Relationship of Governance to Vision and ESLRs**

All board policies support the board's role in supporting the charter. Legal counsel has also helped in insuring all fundamental governing documents integrate and do not contradict each other.

## **Understanding the Role of the Governing Board**

In order for leadership knowledge and qualities be developed in the parent body, parents are asked to sign up each year for one of six committees that help support the school. The committees are: Fundraising, Outreach, Site and Playground, Parent Support, Parent Taught Specialty Classes, Curriculum Advisory. Descriptions of duties and how these committees report and work with the board are described on pages 14-15 of the Parent- Student Handbook. Through this work, parents gain more insight through experience about the role of the board. Committee work is encouraged to develop future board members. Understanding that the boards primary role is overseeing academic and financial accountability is integral to maintaining strong leadership for the school. See the charter pages 37-38, for a list of governing board duties.

## **Governing Board's involvement in Review and Refinement**

The board is the primary body, along with the school's director, for review and refine the schools vision. All stakeholders have input but the actual work is done by the board and the director. A survey of board agendas and minutes will demonstrate the boards focus and involvement in the charter revision. Even though the ESLRs were developed through the certificated staff, the ESLRs were honed from the charter document which the board has been intimately involved with refining.

## **Professional Staff and Governing Board**

The charter document contains a specific language about the roles and relationship of the board and the professional staff, as well as a description of duties of the director, see pages 38-40. Through out the bylaws are designation of duties for the director and their oversight by the board.

## **Board's Evaluation and Monitoring Procedures**

Student performance, fiscal oversight, and overall operations as the board's responsibility is described in the charter, bylaws, and MOU. Fiscal health is near the first item on the agenda each month. The board approves and certifies all major financial reports that go to state. Student performance is reviewed over a period of two or three months in the fall as previous years data is available. It is through the school's creative and innovative board members that many program ideas are generated, such as the CAHSEE incentive and elements of the chapter 5 action plan in this report. All of these elements, operations, academic and financial accountability, are reported to the Willits board of trustees in the End of Year Report. The La Vida board represents by personal appearance to the Willits board and the two boards engage in discussion about these items during the review.

## Complaint and Conflict Resolution Procedures

La Vida is a small, collaborative and accessible environment. Most concerns are encouraged to be talked through and problem solved with all parties involved. The board welcome all to board meetings to discuss ideas, or concerns.

A Uniformed Complaint Procedure is also in place for the formal complaint. This document was developed and approved by legal counsel. It itemizes steps and timelines for the process, and how decisions are made and final. It directs complainants to the state Department of Ed if they are unhappy with the ruling. Fortunately, this complaint procedure is rarely used.

### A3: Leadership and Staff

*a) To what extent based on student achievement data, does the school leadership and staff make decisions and initiate activities that focus on all students achieving the expected schoolwide learning results and academic standards? b) To what extent does the school leadership and staff annually monitor and refine the single schoolwide action plan based on analysis of data to ensure alignment with student needs?*

### Evidence

- CAHSEE incentives
- Weekly Staff meetings, Monthly EC staff meeting
- Daily Check ins
- Report Writer

### Broad-Based and Collaborative

As mentioned in chapter 1, the La Vida school community is not invested in API scores.

For them the score is impersonal. Everyone, however, can get behind student growth. Are the students growing, are they being met at their level, challenged and nurtured? The board reviews student data and scores comprehensively in the fall and three other times during the year when the CAHSEE scores are posted. Faculty reviews data more often since it also works with the MAP results. Faculty generally dedicates a portion of each weekly meeting to the discussion of individual student growth and brainstorm ways to continually support them. Through parent gatherings, curriculum sharing, etc and surveys the school receives important information about thoughts and concerns regarding student growth. Findings from all corners and discussed by all in different venues to determine next steps. The “No Gaps” policy in math was developed in this way. It keeps the school focused on finding out and filling in skills and knowledge for all students.

## School Plan Correlated to Student Learning

In the charter there are very specific goals for achievement such as; math will improve three, 3 points per year, Graduation rate will be minimally at the state level, 85% of the students will show growth on the MAP test, and more see pp 30-32. The progress toward accomplishing these goals are analyzed and reported to the district and the school community in November at the beginning of the End of Year Report .

## Correlation between All Resources, ESLRs and Plan

- The charter, MOU and Parent-Student Handbook list financial policies and budgets for materials and supplies.
- A review of the general ledger will show money spent on materials, supplies , professional development and personnel time.
- Staff meeting notes reveal time and focus on student growth.
- In high school math, a consultant and two teachers are paid for a 90 minute class each week.
- The class schedule of the onsite classes shows CAHSEE prep classes.
- CAHSEE incentives funded by the board.
- Monthly agendas for EC staff meetings indicate topics discussed and training support
- Special Ed services and materials, in budget and general ledger.
- The cost of MAP and Report Writer in budgets and general ledger.

## A4: Leadership and Staff

*To what extent does a qualified staff facilitate achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results through a system of preparation, induction and ongoing professional development.*

### Employment Policies and Practices

- The charter discusses staff qualifications, the expectations of education, compliance with NCLB, and Waldorf experience . (pp. 16, 38-40,42-43)
- The Personnel Handbook lists detailed description of expectations of Educational Coordinators. The handbook has also been carefully reviewed by legal counsel to insure full compliance with the law.
- Teacher contracts also newly reviewed for legal compliance.

### Evidence

- Summer Waldorf workshops
- CCSA regional meetings & annual conference
- staff development by professionals
- Paperwork Guide aka EC Handbook
- EC staff meetings
- Office Flow Chart

- Job Descriptions list expectations and requirements.
- The county credential analyst also tracks the satisfactory standing of credentials. Paychecks will be with held, if credentials are expired.

### **Qualifications of Staff**

- The office staff verifies credentials and references
- Transcripts and job histories are reviewed for verification of qualifications but also for NCLB compliance.
- Resumes and/or job applications with listing of appropriate experience is required.

### **Maximum Use of Staff Expertise**

In a small school everyone wears many hats. The personal interest of teachers is as valuable for specialty classes as is the credential (although the credential is required.) Additional skills and interests are highly valued during the recruitment process. All the subtle personal qualities teachers bring are important at La Vida. Students and EC's are matched whenever possible to potential mutual interests and rapport. If a teacher expresses an interest, they will be encouraged to shaped it into a learning opportunity for students, whether it is tutoring or a specialty class or as a faculty leader. For example, one of our teachers is also a pastry chef, so she is teaching culinary arts classes now. The same teacher is a CERT first responder, so she taught and certified her class in first aid. These are win-win situations for the school. The teacher is having a great time, the students are having a great time and learning valuable skills.

### **Defining and Understanding Practices and Relationships**

Key documents for the administrator and faculty as listed above, are the Personnel Handbook, the Teacher Job Description, and the teacher contract. The charter is fundamental for all the other documents. There is also an EC paperwork guide that is the most detailed about independent study expectations and paperwork. Because La Vida is an “out of the box” school, teachers are requested to ask as many questions as they can invent, in order to understand their unusual assignment. The collaborative nature is important at the school. Each teacher’s actions affect students, parents and colleagues. This is not a place where a teacher can function entirely autonomously.

### **Internal Communication and Planning**

The La Vida population prefers one on one communication. In a professional environment messages and email become important, but still works best with a phone call or a personal touch in. Some teachers have phone issues and no email, so it can be tricky because they are not on campus every day.

Faculty plans things together and then review weekly. Among the Special Ed staff, there is a division of labor and monthly planning meetings with phone call reminders in between. Because of the small size this personalized system works well. It breaks down for those who are only there once a week and don't have email. And faculty try to help each other by reminding that someone needs a phone call.

### **Staff Actions/Accountability to Support Learning**

Teachers like to work collaboratively. Someone may be the lead person on testing, a performance, a schoolwide fieldtrip, a subject area and may be expected to organize the activity or event and then bring the plans to the group for fine tuning and troubleshooting.

Teamwork whether in twos, threes or fours, seems to work best at La Vida. There is the team teaching math, there was a team putting on the fall production, a scarecrow team, a games team, the BITSA team and so on. In staff meetings whenever new material needs to be digested or analyzed, we break into teams or small groups and the work is done together. Otherwise, frankly, it wouldn't get done.

Through the yearlong Appreciative Inquiry process described above in A1.b., with parents and teachers to learn about values of the school population, a by-product was a teacher self-evaluation. The self-evaluation which is linked to the job description is performed biennially and then discussed with the Director. The discussion may include celebrating accomplishments, supports the may Teacher need, areas of growth, and future plans in general. It is a positive, life affirming process that is healthy for the school.

### **Evaluation of Existing Processes**

The school director monitors the students' achievements including academic standards, and designs and implements student programs and teachers' ongoing professional development in direct response to the students needs. It is a frequent and ongoing process. The director hands out first week packs to new students and checks in with them to get an idea of the learning level and discusses curriculum with teachers and office staff in charge of ordering. As students are testing on the MAP, the director is checking scores and bringing the information to the faculty. But the school needs to make new steps to be more effective at using the MAP for immediate impact on student learning. A standardized process will be necessary which will be included in the schoolwide action plan in chapter 5.

Because of the collaborative nature of the faculty, regular evaluation or review of program effectiveness is a normal occurrence. Teachers bring issues at any time if something needs

fixing adjusting. The elementary teachers do a daily check in at 11 o'clock to report on how students are behaving or if they need support because of illness etc. This way the specialty teachers will be alert to sensitivities and can act wisely.

### **A5: Leadership and Staff**

*To what extent are leadership and staff involved in ongoing research or data-based correlated professional development that is focused on identification of student learning needs.*

#### **Support and Professional Development**

The past few years the school has been sending staff to trainings to learn to lead a data based educational program. Discussed earlier, teams of teachers and staff traveled to Pasadena and Sacramento for training in the NWEA MAP program and ZOOM Data.

The current year, teams of teachers and leadership staff will be benefiting from 11 free webinars on the use of ZOOM Data for differentiating, math content standards, vertical teaming, using data to work with students and so on.

The school has brought in trainers in differentiated instruction and has purchased materials and supplies to support differentiation.

Providing a holistic child centered educational approach is important to the school, and the school has sent many teachers to one or two week summer trainings at Rudolf Steiner College. Lately, more trainers are coming to the school bringing these approaches, such as Penni Sparks working with teachers and parents individually and in groups as in the memorable Power Writing workshop for example. The Waldorf in the Home conference and the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education Conferences are others the school does not want to miss.

The school director attended the comprehensive Achievement Gap conference sponsored by Jack O'Connell the California Superintendent of Education. Many ideas from that conference came to the school, also dvd's of the sessions, and contacts with vendors such as the Math Maze game, an excellent tool.

#### **Evidence**

- ZOOM Data
- Differentiated Instruction
- Board Training (Charter Board University book)
- Report Writer
- Alexandria Library System
- Kuder Navigator, career and technical ed.
- Member of CCSA

The California Charter School Conference CCSA is another event that at least the director attends, and sometimes a board member, teacher or parent. Like the Achievement Gap conference it is filled with stories of educational success and countless ideas, contacts and materials.

The board is involved in training as well. Periodic trainings on budget and finance occur and *The Charter Board University* by Brian Carpenter, a new primer on the responsibilities of a charter school board has been informative in important ways.

See also Charter p.10

## A6: Resources

*To what extent are the human, material, physical, and financial resources sufficient and utilized effectively and appropriately in accordance with legal intent of the program(s) to support students in accomplishing the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

### Allocation Decisions

Resources described above are managed “very carefully” at La Vida. A small school’s resources are generally not plentiful, and usually need stretching. The director, business secretaries and teachers are excellent at stretching all available resources to support and continually improve schoolwide learning results.

The school has received 100% funding through the SB740 funding determination process which requires 50% of revenues to be spent on certificated staff, and 80% of allocations to be instructionally related. This is a difficult requirement for such a small school. The current determination expires in 2012.

### Practices

The school provides all financial reports required by the district and the state all of which are enumerated in the MOU Addendum. Reviewing the business practices is part of the independent audit which is also submitted to the county, district and state. The school works to have a clean audit and effective internal controls so that finances are spent appropriately and mistakes don’t happen with the limited revenues.

### Evidence

- Office Flow Chart
- SB 740 funding determination
- Monthly financial reporting to the Board
- Budgets, Interim Reports, Cash Flows
- Unaudited Actuals
- MOU
- Mandatory \$35,000 reserves
- Book deposit system
- Student information system, SASI
- physical site.
-

## **Facilities**

The school feels fortunate to have a special site and location which positively affects all the enter. More details about the facility and oversight are in chapter 1 pg. 12 under School Safety Cleanliness and Facility.

## **Instructional Materials and Equipment**

Discussions about curriculum and materials are detailed throughout this report. For ordering procedures, one of the business secretaries are in charge of ordering curriculum and educational supplies. Parents fill out a Curriculum Choice Form, the two of the clerical staff fill the order from the curriculum closet. If ordering a copy is necessary then one person handles all the orders with an appropriate form. The school uses used texts to help stretch dollars.

Because of the extremely poor return rate of curriculum, the school implemented a refundable deposit of \$50 at the time of curriculum check out. No family is withheld curriculum if they can not afford the deposit, the school works with everyone.

Responding to the need to protect the school's curriculum resources, a new library book check out system was implemented last year, the Alexandria Library System. Installing the book check out system was a community wide collaboration The board president researched potential systems and with the help of parent volunteers all the curriculum were labeled and scanned into the system. Parents and the school receive printed receipts and the tracking of books is far more manageable.

## **Well Qualified Staff**

At La Vida everyone needs to work hard for low wages. The school has 100% highly qualified teachers with regards to NCLB, see chapter 1 pp 13-14.

## **Long Range Planning**

Maintaining a three year projected budget is part of the financial process and it is a part that the overseeing district is keenly aware of. With the down turn of the economy and declining enrollment in the region, the long term pictures is more challenging financially than ever before. The business manager and the director keep a close eye on changes in revenue and report monthly to the board.

The charter school's current charter will expire in June of 2014 and the long term lease of the facility is on the same schedule.

## A7: Charter School Fiscal Operations

*To what extent has the charter school's governing authority and school leadership executed responsible resource planning for the future? Is the charter school fiscally solvent and does it use sound and ethical accounting practices (budgeting/ monitoring, internal controls, audits, fiscal health and reporting?)*

Governing Board Meetings are held each month. At these meetings the Board is presented with the current financial status of the school, and discussions ensue as appropriate. The school Business Manager is usually there to present and explain the numbers. If/ when she is unable to attend she sends an explanation letter of the current finances. The board discusses and approves all budgets.

Professional Auditing is also regularly performed. Through the audit process with Robertson and Associates, several questionnaires are completed which have to do with fiscal planning, reserves, internal controls reporting practices. Weekly auditing occurs at the county. Every expenditure is prepared, reviewed and submitted by three different people at La Vida, which then goes through at least one audit at the county level before it is submitted for payment.

The MOU has guarantees of reserve p. 10 which the school is careful to comply with.

All elements of financial reporting requirements and agreements are in the MOU pp 5-11.

Audit stipulations are also in the charter p 51.

## Evidence

- Reserve
- Review of Board Account every month
- Enrollment policies consider resource availability
- Audit
- Audit practices
- Charter & MOU
- Board Agendas & Minutes

## A8. Charter School Fiscal Operations

*Has the charter school developed policies, procedures, and internal controls for managing the financial operations that meet state laws, generally accepted practices, and ethical standards?*

The Business Manager and La Vida Director work together to guide and monitor the school's finances on a continual basis. These are reviewed by the professional auditor the supervising school district and the county office of education. Auditing laws and practices change every year, and the charter school works to assure it has implemented new procedures as they are developed. The board president's experience has been that all are very careful and reliable, keeping the school in good financial stead.

- County, MCOE, also monitors finance, weekly audits
- Office flow work chart in place
- Internal Controls in place
- Board Meetings including closed sessions follow the Brown Act

### AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Charter, MOU, By-Laws, Personnel Handbook and Special Ed program have all been updated in 2006 and 2009 with preeminent charter legal firm.
- Good working relationship with the District and MCOE
- School has its own non profit tax exempt status.
- Flexibility to adjust to individual learning styles
- Beautiful, safe, family-style setting and facility
- Excellent setting for real world science program
- Caring staff and families support each student
- each student valued
- Financially strong, carries over each year
- Financial adaptability,
- SB740 Funding Determination 100%
- State compliant Financial Accounting structures in place.

### Evidence

- Reserve
- Review of Board Account every month
- Enrollment policies consider resource availability
- Audit
- Audit practices
- Charter & MOU
- Board Agendas & Minutes

- State compliant Attendance Accounting programs in place.
- Office Work Flow Chart structure in place.
- Internal Controls in place.
- Audits are clean with no qualifications and findings are minimal.
- Board fully appreciative of duties overseeing academic and financial accountability.
- Board receives training.
- Board follows Brown Act
- Board has parent representation.
- Uniformed Complaint Procedure in place.
- Conflict of Interest Policy in place.
- Charter and By Laws are well articulated about Board and Charter Director duties.
- Teachers on different pay/time schedules based on work accomplished.
- Big systems have been rolled out and implemented: SASI student accounting system,
- Triangulated Assessment system with NWEA, MAP test, Independent Study Report
- Writer System, Alexandria Library System, ZOOM Data (Data Director) system,
- Collaborative environment: attempts to have all voices heard
- Teachers have flexibility to schedules, don't have to be on campus five days per week.
- Professional Development ongoing and integrated into the program.

## AREAS OF GROWTH

- School population changes mean “starting anew” each year.
- This takes time and energy for an already stretched staff.
- More high achieving students would balance the school better.
- A higher Graduation Rate (even though goal is met) to insure AYP
- Maintaining Waldorf trained teachers that live in the area.
- Stronger parent involvement at committee level work and fundraising
- School would benefit from a deepened culture of accountability.
- Develop more standard formats for program review.
- Develop the data driven education philosophy and action plan.
- Better follow through on use with the MAP and other assessments.
- Communication from school to broader community, always room for improvement.
- Desirable pay salary schedule to entice and keep strong teachers.

## 4. SELF STUDY FINDINGS

### B: STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING— CURRICULUM

*B-1: To what extent do all students participate in a rigorous, relevant, and coherent standards-based curriculum that supports the achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

#### B1 Curriculum Criterion

##### Introduction

Although most of the students at La Vida attend the onsite program (offered on Wednesdays and Thursdays for grades 1-8 and Tuesdays for high school), at least 60% of a student's weekly workload (80% for high school) comes through independent study. Due to this distinct characteristic, curriculum at La Vida is strongly tied to instruction. For students who choose a home-school only option (foregoing the onsite enrichment classes), curriculum *is* instruction. In other words, when a student chooses his or her curriculum (Oak Meadow, for example) instruction is imbedded within the program. Following a work assignment check-off list, created with the use of the report writer program, students complete each module in linear fashion. The work that goes into his or her file (collected every 10 to 20 school days) comes strictly from the home school curriculum and not from assignments given during the onsite classes. The onsite classes are for enrichment purposes designed to concentrate attention on the individual needs of each student and to cover specific California State Standards.

##### Current Educational Research and Thinking

The current educational research on the brain regarding the growth and learning of children corroborates more and more, the findings established by Rudolph Steiner and put into practice by Waldorf School methods (first founded in 1919). Jane Healy, Bruce Perry, Eric Jensen are researchers who have corroborated these findings. The basics of Waldorf Philosophy are:

##### Evidence

- California
- Standards
- ESLRs
- CAHSEE classes
- TR Tuesdays
- Odysseyware
- On-site classes
- Master Student Course
- Community Service
- Work Experience
- Assignment Sheet
- Learning Objectives
- Cross-curricular lessons/projects
- Individualized education
- Student Success Team (SST)
- Teacher Observations
- MAP assessment
- STAR testing
- TR Tuesdays: Cultural Awareness
- Rotating Specialties: Handwork, Cooking, Art
- Work Samples
- Graduation Requirements
- Master Agreement
- Enrollment Data

The structure of the education follows Steiner's pedagogical model of child development, which describes three major developmental stages of childhood (as well as a variety of sub-stages), each having its own learning requirements. The major stages are broadly similar to those described by Piaget.

#### Chapter 1

- Early childhood learning is largely experiential, imitative and sensory-based. The education emphasizes learning through practical activities.
- Elementary school years (age 7-14), learning is regarded as artistic and imaginative. In these years, the approach emphasizes developing children's emotional life and artistic expression across a wide variety of performing and visual arts.
- During adolescence, to meet the developing capacity for abstract thought and conceptual judgment the emphasis is on developing intellectual understanding and ethical ideals such as social responsibility.

### Academic Standards

There are two streams of standards in use at La Vida: Waldorf and California State Standards. When a family enrolls into La Vida they sign a document declaring whether their student will be using either one or both. While all the State standards are covered in a Waldorf curriculum, they are covered in a different order as per grade. As the student advances through the grades, Waldorf becomes more in alignment with the state. For instance, the K through 5 grades there are differences in alignment and there's a much tighter alignment through middle school and in High School they are completely aligned.

A study completed in 2003 highlights where Waldorf and the State standards differ and align. As an example, the State designates Language Arts Standard 1.4 (under vocabulary) for grade 4 as: "know common roots and affixes derived from Greek and Latin and use this knowledge to analyze the meaning of complex words." In Waldorf, this standard isn't studied until grades 6 and 7.

The most commonly used curriculum at La Vida is Oak Meadow. It follows the Waldorf Sequence. Other curriculums used by La Vida students include:

- OdysseyWare: a standards-based online curriculum, used mostly by high school students.
- Live Ed: a Waldorf curriculum designed to teach parents how to teach the Waldorf method/curriculum.
- Core Knowledge: a standards-based curriculum.
- Saxon Math: a homeschool, standards-based curriculum (which is tightly aligned to California State Standards and is used alongside Oak Meadow curriculum, because it more closely follows the state standards).

- Buckle Down: used mostly as a supplement in Math, Language Arts and Science and is California State aligned.
- Science Assessment: used as a supplement and is California State aligned.

All onsite classes are designed with specific state standards imbedded into the lessons and are documented within the syllabi themselves. The syllabi are in turn imbedded into the Report Writer system.

## Congruence

La Vida takes a holistic approach to education and this is reflected both in the curriculum and in the onsite program. As stated in the La Vida High School handbook:

*“Teachers and parents share a view of each adolescent as a developing being who needs not only opportunities to learn, but also ways to express his or her own uniqueness. This program places high value on assisting students to realize and express their own intelligence, and to tackle the larger questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives, for only then can they make fulfilling life choices and authentic contributions. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and express their values and visions by creating and/or collaborating in projects, presentations, and artistic experiences. At the same time, La Vida’s program advocates a strong sense of community. It offers a variety of opportunities for students to participate in community-based learning experiences, including drawing on community members as teachers and mentors, and contributing to the community in the form of service.*

*“Learning plans and approaches address intellect, creativity, curiosity, self awareness, character, values and relationships with peers, parents teachers, mentors, younger children, and elders.”*

Examples of the above mentioned ideals can be found in the integration between subjects in the Oak Meadow curriculum and in the development and implementation of onsite classes (detailed below).

## Student Work

Onsite Classes: All onsite classes are designed each semester using California State Standards as guidelines. For instance the Main Lesson syllabus for grades 6-8 outlines the content of study for the month of January as: “1209-1255 The Albigensian Crusades; Areas of Study: From the 20-year military campaign initiated by the Catholic Church to eliminate the Cathar heresy in Languedoc to the Spanish Inquisition.”

Beneath the Areas of Study, the Content Standards in use for that month are listed: “Social Studies: 6.1, 6.2, Reading: 1.0, 2.0; Writing: 1.0, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5”

The same model is used for the High School math syllabus. For the month of September (2009) the syllabus states: “Through guided discovery students will learn and practice the various aspects of graphing, which include: Ordered pairs, equations, ratios, intercepts, negative numbers, the change in x and y (slopes). Standards: Graphing Functions (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4); Mathematical Reasoning (1.0, 1.2, 1.3)”

This same approach is used for every class; for every class there is a syllabus and for each module (or month) of the semester, standards are congruently designated and covered.

Home School Curriculum: La Vida assigns modules as per curriculum and these assignment check-off lists are created via Report Writer. Report Writer includes a database of all the content standards and these standards can be attached to the assignment sheets, so a student can be informed of what standard he or she is working on when completing any given assignment.

In other words, any assignment a student engages in, whether from the home school curriculum or from an onsite class, there is a standard that accompanies it. Please note, however, that in the lower grades (k-8) often these standards will reflect the Waldorf curriculum, and not necessarily the State’s.

## Accessibility to Curriculum

### 1. Accessibility:

Required classes for HS students include: English 9, 10, 11, 12; US History & Geography; World History; American Government; Economics; Foreign Language; Biology & Chemistry; Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Calculus; Physical Education; Fine Arts.

La Vida has adopted several curriculum programs and a variety of supplemental materials for student and family use. The primary program, Oak Meadow is a Waldorf-inspired independent study curriculum. Families have the option of selecting another curriculum, but it must be approved for use by the Charter School and provided by the family. La Vida also offers the Stech-Vaughn Modified Curriculum for Special Needs students and the Saxon Homeschool program in Mathematics and others. When fiscally possible the Charter School may provide students with supplemental materials including consumables such as art supplies and workbooks, and non-consumables such as books, compact discs, and software.

The Oak Meadow curriculum, approved by the California Department of Education as an alternative, is a user-friendly program with a traditional syllabus and daily assignments. The Waldorf component offers experienced-based learning. Oak Meadow utilizes published textbooks, particularly at the high school level. In fact, the text-based high school program is aligned with California standards.

## **2. Demographics:**

Because of the nature of La Vida (being a small independent study school), the demographics change from year to year. For example in La Vida's yearly self study in 2008-09, "The change in demographics in the 08/09 year is apparent in the shift to a larger white population and fewer Hispanic and American Indian students. 87% white is 14%, higher than the year before.

As stated on pg. 11 of this self study, "At La Vida the number of middle class families is on the rise from 35% in 07/08 and 25% in 06/07. Conversely fewer low income families eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch are attending the remote location." What was learned from these findings was also published in the study: "Overall fewer families can afford staying home with their students. More have to find jobs to make ends meet."

## **3. Special Needs Students**

La Vida provides accommodations based on student need in response to assessment. M.A.P (Measure of Academic Progress), an NWEA computer testing program or another type of diagnostic, is used at the beginning of the year to assess student's academic needs and proficiencies. Often as a result of these tests, the school determines what students have special needs. If curriculum is modified, usually to Steck-Vaughn, a SST program is initiated to support and track student growth. There are tutoring opportunities during the onsite program for one-on-one attention, as well as during EC meetings between the teacher and student. All adjusted curriculum are shown in the Master Agreement and how lessons are assigned during learning periods.

## **Integration Among Disciplines**

Integration among the subjects is a key aspect of a La Vida education experience. The Waldorf approach has integration as its foundation, and can be found both in the homeschool curriculum and with the onsite program. Because the strong majority of families choose Oak Meadow as their home study curriculum, that will be the one addressed here.

## 1. Oak Meadow Curriculum:

The subjects that most integrated throughout grades 1-8 are Social Studies and Language Arts. Vocabulary and spelling lessons are pulled directly from lessons in Social Studies. As an example, a lesson (#20) about Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt (from Grade 7), contain vocabulary that will be studied as part of the corresponding Language Arts lesson.

The critical thought questions in Social Studies require Language Arts skills and satisfy certain California State Standards in both subjects. An example can be found on page 20 of the World History Learning Guide for grade seven, with this assignment: “Write a story in which you describe how World War II could have been resolved without dropping the atomic bomb on Japan. Use your imagination. Don’t worry if your plan seems impractical. Sometimes incredible new discoveries come from mankind’s willingness to dream. *See your English Syllabus for details.*” (Italics are ours).

During the high school years, integration between the subjects drops off, but the foundation built in the early grades come into play with the way the separate subjects are studied. Here’s a quote from Oak Meadow’s High School catalogue describing World History:

“In addition to learning historical facts, students are introduced to the artists, musicians, literature and influential people of historical periods. This course integrates geography throughout and emphasizes critical thinking, the development of research skills, and the analysis of relationships between people and events as a means of understanding current world events.”

## 2. Onsite Program:

Integration is a large part of the onsite program for all grades K-12. Teachers consult with each other and match syllabi as best as possible to correspond specialty classes with main lessons.

For grades 6-8, for example, the main lesson this semester is the Renaissance. The art teacher (who teaches all the grades) has focused her lessons for 6-8 grades on duplicating famous Renaissance paintings. Students will learn a Renaissance song and/or dance in music and movement classes.

During movement class, Waldorf approaches are used to integrate PE with mental math, or spelling, or even science.

Language Arts lessons are pulled directly from what is being studied in social studies. An example is the essays on Tribes the 6-8 graders completed in the Fall 2009 semester. After a block studying ancient tribes around the world, the students broke into groups and created their own tribes and eventually wrote a journal entry as a “member” of that tribe,

documenting a specific experience (a hunt, a wedding, a battle, etc), using information they had gathered from earlier research.

The most thorough area of integration comes at the High School level every last Tuesday of the month, designated:

### **TR TUESDAYS:**

All high school students are required to attend what La Vida calls TR Tuesdays, where each student meets with a TR, Teacher of Record to get support from a NCLB highly qualified Teacher in science, social studies and art. TR Tuesdays is also used for curriculum enrichment, in which the student is socialized in a real-world context through cultural awareness studies. The students cook a meal for the school, are introduced to other cultures through food and research. This program develops communication skills and builds teamwork through interactive activities.

As an example, the TR Tuesday before the Thanksgiving holiday, students participated in making a typical Native American meal that featured corn and tubers. Both vegetables were researched in terms of their uses by various tribes and how both crops have evolved today. Students participated in all aspects of cooking, from setting tables, to chopping vegetables, to clean-up. Before the meal started the culture group, who had also designed appropriate place mats with information about the food to be eaten, verbalized assigned facts about Native American culture and diet.

### **Curricular Development, Evaluation and Revisions**

During the 2006-07 year La Vida held a curriculum review and adoption to decide on what curricula to use for the school. Participants in the process included board members, faculty, and parents. The curriculum mentioned elsewhere in this report were chosen or renewed at that time. Evaluating the effectiveness of various curricula is an ongoing process at La Vida, specifically in regards to matching them with the California State Standards and changes are made almost every year. For example it was deduced (based on faculty and family input) that Oak Meadow's math curriculum was not aligned to the standards, so , a standards based curriculum was sought. Eventually Saxon Homeschool and Sadler Oxford Progress in Math were adopted. So far the reports from parents and faculty alike indicate that Saxon Homeschool is a preferred and La Vida will continue to use it.

Grading policies have changed over the past three years with a MAP report included in the progress report sent home at the end of each semester. The Report Writer program first implemented in the 2008-09 school year has allowed for a deeper capacity for aligning assignments with State standards, and for giving students feedback during each assignment period.

Reviews of curriculum, graduation requirements, credits, grading policies take place during faculty meetings (every Wednesday from 3-4:30), Board meetings (held once a month) and during Parent Teas (held three times a semester). Also, families are given the opportunity to change curriculum if they find it isn't working for their purposes and if the school agrees.

Feedback from parents and students is essential in keeping the curriculum relevant, coherent and effective, therefore La Vida asks every parent and student to participate in filling out evaluations once a semester. These evaluations help decide future actions the school takes in enhancing or changing certain areas (like testing, grading, curriculum, specialty classes, etc).

### Curriculum Policies

One of the bigger challenges for La Vida is matching the needs of homeschooling families with the requirements of the California State standards. In La Vida's nine years of existence there has been significant changes in staff, clientele and the curriculum. In the first several years, Waldorf curriculum was primary and the staff was mostly Waldorf trained. Testing (STAR and MAP) was frowned upon by many families (and there retains some resistance from a few families), and there was a large gap in awareness and understanding of the state standards.

Studies over the last four years have shown that more and more families are familiar with the standards and have shown an openness towards testing. The staff at La Vida today are primarily public school trained and have little or no Waldorf training.

With those changes in mind, Oak Meadow has proven to be a good fit for La Vida students. Students who complete an Oak Meadow module and are quizzed by their ECs, tend to show strong retention levels. Those students who show a low retention level tend to rush through their work and often don't finish entire assignments, doing the minimum. These students are asked to either do the work over again, and/or receive appropriate comments in their work folders, reminding them to take their time and complete the assignments.

Oak meadow assignments feature strong critical thinking questions for social studies and language arts, and the science curriculum features practical and meaningful experiments that any student can accomplish at home.

An example comes from Oak Meadow Physical Science for grade 8 on a lesson entitled "Center of Gravity":

*"Make a mark on a ball with a pen. Roll the ball around on a level surface several times and watch where the mark is when the ball stops. Describe what happens each time. Then put a piece of modeling clay or beeswax on the spot where you marked the*

*ball. Now try rolling the ball around several times, and watch where the clay is when the ball stops. Describe what happens this time. Write a conclusion using the term ‘center of gravity.’*

The natural environment offers a plethora of opportunities for scientific exploration, as the area around La Vida’s campus is home to an old growth redwood grove, the Russian River Watershed, three small lakes, and gardens created by the pioneering methods of John Jeavons (originator of bio-intensive farming and Ecology Action). Last year, the students took part in the salmon release program, where salmon raised in fisheries are released into the wild once they reach a certain size. The Field Science program has been so successful that the Jr High class has won first place in its category at the county Science Fair for six years and second place, last year when they diverted from natural sciences into pop rockets.

Such programs have developed as part of La Vida’s ongoing research into curriculum development and enhancement. This research comes from faculty meetings, board meetings, input from students and parents, as well as outside speakers, etc.

## **Articulation and Follow-up Studies**

### **Feeder Schools:**

La Vida draws from all schools in inland Mendocino County and beyond . As a K-12 alternative, the school does not participate in the traditional district system of feeder schools. Most students who come to La Vida, do so because of a strict homeschooling philosophy (less common), or because they have been failing at other high schools (common), or due to health reasons, For whatever reasons often La Vida is seen as a stepping stone, or a stopping place between schools. Retention of student population is discussed on pg. 43 of this self study and strategies for change are included in chapter 5.

### **Graduate Follow-up Studies:**

Oak Meadow and the overall home study program at La Vida has proven to be effective at preparing students for college. The very nature of independent study places much more responsibility on students than the average public school, because there isn’t a teacher there to check up on them. Those students who make it through the college prep program at La Vida and graduate with intentions of going to college, find success at that level. They have reported that they were more equipped than their young college mates to think critically and manage their time.

## **B-2. Curriculum Criterion**

*To what extent do all students have access to the school's entire program and assistance with a personal learning plan to prepare them for the pursuit of their academic, personal, and school-to-career goals?*

### **Variety of Programs**

La Vida offers high school students a unique opportunity to combine Independent Study curriculum with on-site specialty classes; to develop individualized learning plans; to collaborate with parents, teachers, community mentors, and other students; and to integrate art and other creative expression into their learning experiences.

La Vida offers a variety of choices to accommodate high school students who wish to study independently. This includes a combination of site based and independent study options to fulfill the requirements for a high school diploma and meet the needs of those students bound for community colleges or technical institutions, as well as those seeking enrollment in 4 year universities. Students have the opportunity to create and develop projects and presentations, and design some or all of their electives according to their goals, interests and capabilities.

An example of a project is called the Economics Project. It's a major work that should reflect a genuine interest on the part of the student. It is undertaken in the senior year and is required for a high school diploma.

Another example is Independent Projects. A student may design an Independent Project for elective credits. The project must have goals and objectives and a formal outcome and be authorized by the Educational Coordinator.

Work Readiness Certificate:

The Work Readiness Certificate is open to any high school student. This certificate does serve as the alternative to a high school diploma if the student is unsuccessful in Algebra I or the High School Exit Exam. Possession of the Work Readiness Certificate enhances opportunities for the student entering the job market and shows employers that he/she is ready to work.

For students that are aiming to attend college after graduation, the following requirements must be met:

- 40 units of English
- 30 units of math (including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II)
- 30 units of Science/Health
- 30 units of History
- 20 units of Physical Education

- 20 units of Foreign Language
- 10 units of Visual/Performing Arts
- 5 units of Community Service
- 10 units of Technology/Computers
- 40 units of Electives

Students can also take online courses through OdysseyWare, which supplies quality assignments in all the core classes including:

- World Geography
- US History
- Government
- Economics
- 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- Civil War
- World History
- Vietnam Era
- Algebra I
- Geometry
- Algebra II
- Pre calculus
- Trigonometry
- Consumer Math
- Integrated Mathematics I
- Biology
- Integrated Physics and Chemistry
- Earth Science
- Freshman to Senior English
- A series of electives including Spanish and Communication

La Vida students can enroll and participate in the county's ROP , Regional Occupation Program, which offers Business Studies and Computer Technology. The purpose is to expand learning beyond the regular high school offerings; to learn specific career or technical skills; to supplement high school credits.

La Vida offers a Work Experience Program, which is open to any high school student that wishes to get high school credit for employment. If a student works for wages and wants to earn units, he/she will meet with the Work Experience Education Coordinator to develop an individualized plan for the semester. Any given student can earn 1-10 units of high school credit each semester.

## **Student-Parent-Staff Collaboration**

Parent, student and staff collaboration is essential for optimum student success at La Vida. Although it isn't always easy to get parent involvement, La Vida offers Parent Teas at least twice a semester, where the parents are invited to the school to discuss all aspects of schooling from curriculum to onsite classes to community building. Generally speaking there is about 30 percent parent involvement with these meetings.

It is a requirement for parents to be a part of the EC meetings for grades K-8, where homework is collected and students are quizzed. At the high school level, parents are encouraged but not required to meet with teachers during the EC meetings (which take place ever 10 school days).

Student success is often tied to parent involvement at La Vida.

## **Monitoring/Changing Student Plans**

Students and parents will at times find that the curriculum is either too challenging or not challenging enough. With these cases changes are made respective to the student's needs and are shown in addendums to the curriculum and Master Agreement.

## **B-3: Curriculum Criterion**

*To what extent are students able to meet all the requirements of graduation upon completion of the high school program?*

## **Real World Applications**

The following skills are part of La Vida's purpose in teaching students real world applications:

- Critical thinking skills (problem solving, analyzing, and applying knowledge) .
- Effective use of technology.
- Creative expression through various forms of the arts, e.g.: music, visual/studio arts, drama and movement.
- Knowledge of pertinent issues of health and the development of physical fitness.
- Strong citizenship and leadership skills by planning and implementing a project in service to the school and greater community.
- Ability to engage in responsible, compassionate peer relationships.
- Ability to collaborate and work effectively with others in cooperative groups.
- Study skills and habits (e.g., note taking, library research skills, studying strategies).
- Ability to plan, initiate, and complete a project.
- Ability to reflect on and evaluate one's own and other's learning.

## Meeting Graduation Requirements

Students at La Vida are enrolled in a course of study that meets graduation requirements. It has two diploma tracks, a college prep for UC requirements, a general studies track and a Work Readiness Certificate track. Some students need further assistance and support in order to meet all requirements of graduation.

La Vida has a variety of programs to support its diverse population toward meeting the requirements of graduation that have been discussed throughout this report. These include attending TR Tuesday classes once a month, attending CAHSEE prep classes for writing and math every Tuesday, using online curriculum such as OdysseyWare, receiving extra tutoring through EC meetings, and through Individual Education Plans (IEP's). In 2008, La Vida served about 25% of its students with special needs, either possessing an IEP or SST. See pg. 12 for Special Ed and see pp. 26-28 for high school CAHSEE data and Graduation Rate.

## 4. SELF STUDY FINDINGS

### C: STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING— INSTRUCTION

#### C-1: Instruction

*To what extent are all students involved in challenging learning experiences to achieve the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

#### Independent Study:

La Vida Charter School is an Independent study school that integrates on-site classes and homeschooling curriculum to provide our students with a personalized education. The La Vida program is child centered; Waldorf influenced and begins at the level of the student.

The school provides an individual education for each child. Students, kindergarten through eighth grade attend on-site classes two days a week and work at home the other three. High school students attend classes one day a week and complete the rest of their schooling at home. In the elementary grades K-8<sup>th</sup> parents are the main instructor and provide the foundation and structure for their child's homeschooling experience. In the elementary grades parents are key to their child's success in homeschooling. In high school parents are less involved due to the nature of the high school student.

All students are assigned to an Educational Coordinator or EC. Parents and elementary students meet with their EC at least every twenty school days. High school students meet with their EC at least every ten school days. Parents, students and EC are in communication frequently. The role of the EC is to oversee and guide the parent and student in their homeschooling endeavor. Each learning period, the EC assigns student work from school approved curriculum. Parents and students are given options in curriculum prior to the school

#### Evidence

- On-Site Classes
- Small Class size
  
- TR Tuesdays: Herbal Class, Cooking Class, Clay/Art Classes
- Field Science Classes
  
- California Standards
- ESLRs
- CAHSEE classes
- Odysseyware
- Master Student Course

year, thus providing more of a “custom fit” opportunity to meet the student’s needs, interests and learning styles.

La Vida has recently implemented the use of a computer program designed to assist EC’s in the paperwork aspect of homeschooling. The computer program is called “Report Writer” by School Pathways. School Pathways was created by a group of Independent Study teachers who needed to streamline and organize the paperwork and curriculum being used.

Report Writer is unique in that multiple curriculums, State Educational Standards and recommended assignments are all embedded in a single program. Using Report Writer, teachers can assign work from numerous curricula while making connections to standards that are being covered and explored.

Through all of the listed evidence and data students are exposed to and observe real world experiences that allow them to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of various core subjects. Students also are able to demonstrate empathetic skills such as respect, compassion, and a sensitivity of real world and cultural differences through TR Tuesdays (an on-site day at La Vida), field trips, community service, work experience and much more. Teachers instruct students through various modes such as visual, oral, auditory, and kinesthetic ensuring that all students are engaged and participating in their education. Students who participate in TR Tuesdays are exposed to an interdisciplinary experience incorporating numerous standards from many core subjects as well as life skills.

### **Student Understanding of Performance Levels:**

All on-site courses are accompanied by a semester long syllabi. Each syllabus is developed and crafted by the teacher providing that course. Syllabi are created with the inclusion of the CA state standards. Numerous state standards are incorporated and explored throughout the La Vida on-site program K-12. Embedded in the course syllabi are annual events and activities, which help to create a cohesive

### **Evidence**

- Community Service
- Science Fair
- Field Trips: King Tut Exhibit, Safari West, Tall Ships, MacKerricher State Park
- Bag Lunches for the Hungry program
- Work Experience
- Course syllabi
- Self Awareness Portfolio/
- Self Evaluation
- Student Success Team (SST)
- School Play/Performances: Open house Talent Show, Thankfulness Feast
- Spelling Bee
- “Art Under 20”
- Read-a-Thon
- Ukiah Haiku Contest
- Book Fair: Crazy hair/Hat Day, Pajama day, Dress as Favorite Character Day

experience. Once created the syllabi are given to the parents, placed in each student's master file, uploaded onto Report Writer and posted at the school.

### **Differentiation of Instruction:**

Students of all grade levels and abilities are challenged through individualized education. The individualized education manifests through various ways, including SST meetings, EC meetings, curriculum, on-site classes, Master student course, opportunity to participate in various activities such as plays, performances, Spelling Bee, work experience, and community service. La Vida offers various curriculum choices most of which emphasize and are based on the CA state standards, frameworks as well as the La Vida Charter. Students are given the instruction they need while being met at their academic and emotional level. Teachers are encouraged to be creative and individual in their instructional strategies and methods helping to promote challenging learning experiences for all students.

La Vida's teachers differentiate group work as well as standards based content. La Vida's student population ranges in needs and the staff at La Vida is knowledgeable in implementing a program that grasps each student's interest and supports them while providing a challenging standards based instruction. On-site teachers prepare their lessons and classroom activities around their student's needs, abilities and interests to better reach each child.

In order to better serve our community and students La Vida implements several steps to accommodate the students. The process begins with the enrollment procedure, through interviews of the parents or guardians and the student with the administrator and teachers. Often times, discussion with former teachers and schools, and student file review are included in the initial process.

Parents and teachers work closely together in the elementary grades to focus and adjust the student program to better meet student needs.

In high school it has been observed that students have often fallen through the cracks in the conventional school setting; in these cases a modified curriculum is necessary.

### **Evidence**

- Cherishing Youth Day
- Peace day
- First Week Discussion Sheet and Packet
- EC Meeting

## High and Low Achieving Students:

La Vida recognizes that some of our students struggle with achieving the standards and ESLRs, so we have numerous programs to support their learning: CAHSEE prep classes, SST meetings, various curricula, tutoring. Students in these classes or programs are supported and encouraged to grow and expand their understanding while learning the skills and knowledge they need to think critically and analyze information. Although not all students are working at grade level they are working in curriculum that meets CA standards for their abilities.

La Vida has a child centered instructional method; the program is ideally positioned to adjust to the academic level of the student. A student who has been identified as academically low achieving will be evaluated to determine the best combination of learning styles most beneficial for the student; adjustments in their academic program may then be made. Students who are more than a grade level behind will be evaluated by a Student Success Team in order to explore more options.

At High School level, entering students are often at risk and the entry level diagnostic indicates they may be far below grade level. Rather than wait for a meeting, the student is put in a modified curriculum to get started and an SST meeting is set up as soon as possible to assess the student's progress.

La Vida offers a variety of modified curriculum choices in an effort to match the needs of individual student who may be struggling below grade level expectations. Steck-Vaughn is often used. Other curricular and program interventions frequently used are: Options curriculum for reading, writing, math and science. Buckle Down which focuses on California standards content. The Key Curriculum which specializes in math and the Reading Naturally program.

In addition, La Vida offers tutoring, especially for high school math students. Online supports such as Teacherbot (math tutorial), and Odysseyware for credit remediation are also available.

The Student Success Team may determine that a student should be assessed for special education services or services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. However,

## Evidence

- Curriculum Choices:
- Steck-Vaughn
- Options
- Buckle Down
- Key Curriculum Press; Keys to Math series and Miquon Math,
- Reading Naturally and other similarly teacher designed reading programs
- Tutors
- Teacherbot
- Odysseyware

curriculum modifications typically provide the student with enough scaffolding to achieve meaningful learning.

La Vida prefers to offer our high achieving students, with increased forms of enrichment, rather than acceleration to the next grade level. Studies have shown that students receiving an enriched education did better in school than equally able children without it. (Walberg, 1995)

### **Goals for increased enrichment activities include:**

- Increasing ability to analyze and solve problems,
- developing profound, worthwhile interests,
- stimulating originality, initiative and self direction. (Hill in *Shore et al*, 1991)
- Ways that La Vida serves its high achievers include but are not limited to:
- cross discipline integrated curriculum,
- differentiated instruction,
- freedom to explore new work if exhibiting motivation,
- contact with professionals that might function as mentors,
- having enriched materials available if pupil finishes earlier than others,
- competitions run by private groups and community sponsors,
- classes at the local junior college,
- increased in-depth learning and the promotion of higher-order skills: especially of real-world problems, increasing social consciousness,
- providing out of class sessions giving the very able students an opportunity to work at their own pace, perhaps with others of the same ability or interests. (Freeman 1998)

### **Student Perceptions:**

La Vida's Self Assessment, Portfolio, and Self Evaluation encourages students to reflect upon their own learning by completing these interpersonal activities. Students will demonstrate self-direction, self motivation and self knowledge.

La Vida challenges students to reflect on their own learning through courses on critical interpersonal and self-management skills needed to succeed in independent learning. The goal is that students will develop meta cognitive abilities, thus being more self directed in school and in life. Through these courses Students learn how to set priorities, manage time, overcome procrastination, avoid peer pressure, develop long-term goals, and communicate more effectively. Each year some kind of self knowledge course is offered on site for the high school students. Some examples are Me 101, Me, You 102, Media Psychology, Personal Power, Grains of Change (coping with anxiety).

### **Student Understanding of Performance Levels:**

During the initial student/parent/EC meeting La Vida students are provided with the expectations of their performance level. At this meeting, goals, expectations, and curriculum timeline is explored and established. Students are made aware of what their expected performance level is and what the plan will be to effectively reach those goals and timelines. Students are provided with support, encouragement and resources to meet their performance level. Report writer allows the EC to spell out the expectations for each learning period as well as for the semester in the Master Agreement.

At the initial meeting students, parents and their EC decide the best approach concerning curriculum choice as well as whether the student will attend on-site courses or do independent study only. The students are not required to attend on-site classes.

Every student is given a Learning Record generated from the Report Writer Program. This Learning Record is the students assignment sheet for their twenty day learning period (for elementary students), or ten day learning period (for high school students) broken down weekly for each curriculum. The assignment sheet clearly lays out the expectations and activities that student is to complete. Students and families are also made aware by the EC that if any problems, issues, or help is needed the EC is available through various modes of communication to assist the family and student to ensure understanding and completion of work.

### **C-2: Instruction**

*To what extent do all teachers use a variety of strategies and resources, including technology and experiences beyond the textbook and the classroom, that actively engage students, emphasize higher order thinking skills, and help them succeed at high levels?*

#### **Current Knowledge:**

La Vida teachers engage in continuous professional development to stay current in teaching strategies that will most benefit our student population and student needs.

As a staff we continually add to our repertoire of instructional strategies that engage students. La Vida teachers teach in their area of expertise as well as other life interests. During staff meetings, staff share ideas and instructional strategies that support our students and encourage critical thinking skills, knowledge and understanding of core subject areas.

#### **Collaboration:**

On-site staff, work collaboratively to align the classes with cross-curricular lessons, projects and themes to support a cohesive learning experience for all students. Teachers also collaborate when creating their syllabi and yearly activity and events calendar to support further cohesion.

learning experience for all students. Teachers also collaborate when creating their syllabi and yearly activity and events calendar to support further cohesion. At the beginning of the school year La Vida Main Lesson teachers created three themes for their class. Each theme was shared and incorporated with all the specialty teachers. The specialty teachers used the themes and worked them into the syllabi of the courses they taught with those students. This collaboration is crucial to helping support integration across disciplines and support student achievement and understanding.

School activities and events are often created based on student interests and needs. La Vida takes the student satisfaction surveys seriously and by doing so uses the information to help guide future classes and activities. Some courses and activities which came about from the student satisfaction surveys and interests are: rock band, journalism, web design, wood-working, logic class, ceramics, field trips, talent show (initially started by students), and opposites day in December 2009.

### Teachers as Coaches:

Part of the La Vida philosophy for on-site classes is to promote academics through social engagement. La Vida also believes that learning best occurs when children are in an environment where they feel safe, happy and respected. The staff at La Vida successfully creates such an atmosphere, in combination with stimulating lessons, so the student's learning is optimized. Teachers use hands on techniques to draw students into the activity and allow them to experience it firsthand. Teachers also, use student experiences, background knowledge and cultural context to allow students to further build on knowledge and make information resonate in a more meaningful and personal way.

La Vida believes that learning best occurs from the Waldorf model. As a result, La Vida draws on an understanding of developmental stages and readiness to learn academic and social concepts. The Waldorf curriculum supports the developmental capacities which build and manifest as the child matures. For example, La Vida uses myth and storytelling as a conduit for multiple content and skill development areas.

This rich literature waters the child's deep fertile imagination,

### Evidence

- Cross-curricular lessons/projects
- Technology
- La Vida's Mission
- Bloom's Taxonomy
  
- Collaboration
- Calendar/Syllabi
- Individualized Education
  
- TR Tuesdays: Cultural Awareness
- Real World Experiences (Field Trips, Field Science)
- Work Experiences
  
- Tutoring
- Use of student background knowledge for planning lessons to encourage student interest

awakens an awareness of connection with the human family and develops an appreciation for world cultures that enhances a global perspective. Concurrently students are exposed to problem-solving and conflict resolutions options that allow for self-discovery and self-understanding that builds the capacity for empathy. Critical thinking is also supported through the curriculum which requires frequent writing and expression of ideas and opinions.

The emphasis on individual attention and collaborative learning by La Vida teachers, parents and community mentors guides and encourages students to reach for their highest goals. By combining academics, creative projects and individual choices, La Vida Charter School's program enables its students to blossom into enthusiastic, responsible, and caring members of society.

### **Examination of Student Work:**

Students are required to meet with their EC (a CA credentialed teacher) every ten school days or less for high school and every 20 school days or less for elementary students. At these EC meetings students and teachers are supported through discussion, observation and the use of various resources. If students are struggling or need further support the EC will provide the information and framework to support the student in growth.

Student Success Team (SST) meetings are set up to support students with both academic and behavioral needs. Students are provided with a challenging, CA Standards based curriculum regardless of their academic level, to help them succeed at high levels.

Student work samples from elementary through high school show examples of skills in critical thinking, problem solving and reasoning.

La Vida's students are acquainted with and utilize technology in a variety of ways. La Vida offers courses through on-line curriculum, such as Odysseyware. In addition, students use the Internet to research information for various classes and assignments as well as to prep for the CAHSEE and STAR tests.

### **Evidence**

- Teacher attended Waldorf Seminars
- Rotating Specialties: Handwork, Cooking, Games, Art, Activities
- Educational Coordinator (EC) Meeting
- Teacher Observations
- Student Success Team (SST) Meeting

Students have had the opportunity to participate in a variety of technologically driven or incorporated courses such as Writing for Blogs, Web Design, Introduction to Computers, and a Multimedia Program. In the spring La Vida will be offering a Career Technical Education Program for students interested in a career in various types of technology. In the past students taking biology who were uncomfortable dissecting real animals could participate in an on-line program where they dissected virtual animals. Also, biennially students have the opportunity to take a part and reassemble a computer.

La Vida students often go beyond the textbook for information. Utilizing a variety of sources from the local library, their multimedia collection, as well as activities and events; the library is used to research, through a variety of different literature as well as through the internet. Students have had the opportunity to participate and observe a myriad of activities providing firsthand knowledge.

La Vida offers students tutoring and support materials to enhance their learning experience and ensure growth.

### **Real World Experiences:**

Through work experience and community service students are able to observe and participate in real world experiences encouraging them to use knowledge in the core subject areas and beyond. Through community service and our “Bag Lunches for the Hungry” program, students are provided an opportunity to demonstrate compassion, respect, and sensitivity.

La Vida’s on-site science program is abundant with real world experiences for the students. Field science classes are conducted within various ecosystems existing onsite at the ranch. Old growth redwood forests, oak woodlands, pond, creek and grassland ecosystems are all explored. Unique plant and animal adaptations within each of these environments is studied and their relationship to one another. A focus on watershed science is used to fully integrate math, science, language arts and history into a field course unit. Wildlife is abundant at the ranch and frequently offers a learning opportunity to further enhance a real world experience for students.

### **Evidence**

- Teacher attended Waldorf Seminars
- Rotating Specialties: Handwork, Cooking, Games, Art, Activities
- Educational Coordinator (EC) Meeting
- Teacher Observations
- Student Success Team (SST) Meeting
- Work Experience
- Community Service
- Field Biology course
- Field Science courses
- “Art Under 20”
- High School Taiko Drum Group (community performances)
- GASP grant recipient with Elizabeth Raybee (created a 10x20 mosaic wall at the Willits Skate Park)
- Science Fair
- “Bag Lunches for the Hungry” program
- Field Trips:
- King Tut,
- Tall Ships, Angel Island,
- hotel with geothermal & solar energy

At La Vida students are provided with many opportunities for real world experiences. Many of these opportunities enable students to fully participate in hands on activities while others are better suited for visual and audio participation. “Art Under 20” is a juried art show and big community event which allows students to share their art. The Taiko Drum Group performed for the community at large and provided students with a cultural experience in addition to a percussion performance.

La Vida students have had the opportunity to attend a variety of field trips ranging from viewing artifacts from King Tut’s tomb in San Francisco to visiting a local hotel where geothermal and solar energy is used, to an historical reenactment at Angel Island, and to a Tall Ships adventure. Students are exposed to numerous hands on real world experiences to develop their studies and further extend their understanding and education.

## Evidence

- Paleotechnics Day
- Alaskan Husky Spirit Team Presentation
- Solar Oven Creation
- Tuesday Program
- : Parent lead classes

## Areas of Strength:

- Differentiated instruction for on-site courses as well as in the homeschooling
- Personalized education for all students
- On-site Program includes hands-on real world experiences for students

## Areas to Grow:

- Support for learning to use technology

## 4. SELF STUDY FINDINGS

### *D: STANDARDS-BASED LEARNING— Assessment and Accountability*

#### **D-1 Assessment and Accountability**

*To what extent does the school use a professionally acceptable assessment process to collect, disaggregate, analyze and report student performance data to the parents and other shareholders of the community?*

#### **D-2 Assessment and Accountability**

*To what extent do teachers employ a variety of assessment strategies to evaluate student learning? To what extent do students and teachers use these findings to modify the teaching/learning process for the enhancement of the educational process of every student?*

##### **Assessment Process**

La Vida collects and analyzes student data and continually works toward reporting to all stakeholders the successes and needs of the school.

Teachers and administrators can disaggregate student achievement data for CSTs, CAHSEE, STAR and MAP. At the beginning of the school year new students are assessed using MAP testing for Language Arts and Math. Students with lower results are placed in specialty classes, especially the CAHSEE prep for Math and Writing. Furthermore, this assessment process is analyzed by the principal and the teachers as important information about the strengths and weaknesses of the students they will be educating.

##### **Determination of Performance Levels**

The schools' goal is to assess each year the California State Content Standards in Language Arts, Math and Science through the **MAP**,

##### **Evidence**

- California Standards progress reports
- MAP assessment
- CAHSEE classes and CAHSEE tests
- TR Tuesdays
- OdysseyWare
- On-site classes
- Master Student Course
- EC Meetings
- Board Meetings
- Assignment Sheet Learning Objectives
- IEP's

***Measured Academic Performance test***, published by Northwest Evaluation Association, NWEA. This formative test, which includes national norm reference data, is designed to show what the student has mastered and is precisely ready to learn next.

MAP testing is employed twice more (during the months of October and March), and all students are required to take part as the report that comes from the testing informs the school about where progress has occurred and where growth needs to happen. Subjects tested are Reading, Language Usage and Math. Only the educators, principal and respective parents/guardians of the students have access to the score results, which are sent home as part of the progress report packet in January and in June.

Overall assessment reports are shared and discussed in the fall with the Board during the regular meetings.

STAR testing occurs in April, and all students are required to take it. Results are made available to staff, the board, students and parents.

At La Vida, teachers measure the students' course work based on a 1 through 4 numbering system where a mark of "1" informs the student and parent that the student is working far below standards and "4" means the student is working above the standards. The subjects themselves are broken down into their principle standards, so that Language Arts, for example, will feature many subheadings such as: comprehension, vocabulary, writing. These subheadings correlate with the California Content Standards and are therefore specific to that grade level, such that each progress report form is tailored to match the student's grade level. Not only are the specific areas of study graded with the number system, but teachers are encouraged to write comments for each of their respective students.

Parents/guardians and students are given extensive information about where the student needs to focus more time and energy. A student might be doing just fine with algebraic functions, but is struggling in geometry. The progress report will show that.

Included in the progress report is the MAP test results taken earlier in the semester. For students that have taken the MAP

## Evidence

- STAR Testing
- Individualized education
- Student Success Team (SST)
- Teacher Requirements
- Master Agreement
- Enrollment Data

on more than one occasion, the report will show a comparison graph of the cumulative scores. This helps the teachers, students and parents see what areas the students needs to improve in and where they are most strong.

### **Appropriate Assessment Strategies**

Below is a list of ongoing pupil outcomes and assessments which help support and track student growth throughout the year in addition to the three assessments listed above.

**The Learning Record:** is the key document and record of assignments and attendance for independent study. It represents a maximum of 20 school days for elementary students and a maximum of 10 school days for High School students. Learning Records report work completed (such as books read, field trips, on site classes attended and lessons accomplished in curriculum), progress toward goals, parent and teacher evaluative comments along with samples in the four core area, plus arts and electives.

**Goals:** the basis for pupil outcomes, are created as a focal point of personalized academic study for each semester. Parents are requested to follow the learning guidelines for grade-level requirements at La Vida and will be provided a copy of learning guidelines appropriate for the grade level of their student.

### **Assessment Process**

La Vida collects and analyzes student data and continually works toward reporting to all stakeholders the successes and needs of the school.

Teachers and administrators can disaggregate student achievement data for CSTs, CAHSEE, STAR and MAP. At the beginning of the school year new students are assessed using MAP testing for Language Arts and Math. Students with lower results are placed in specialty classes, especially the CAHSEE prep for Math and Writing. Furthermore, this assessment process is analyzed by the director and the teachers as important information about the strengths and weaknesses of the students they will be educating.

### **Determination of Performance Levels**

The schools' goal is to assess each year the California State Content Standards in Language Arts, Math and Science through the **MAP, Measured Academic Performance test**, published by Northwest Evaluation Association, NWEA. This formative test, which includes national norm reference data, is designed to show what the student has mastered and is precisely ready to learn next.

MAP testing is employed twice more (during the months of October and March), and all students are required to take part as the report that comes from the testing informs the school about where progress has occurred and where growth needs to happen.

**Main Lesson Books:** from site based classes or from home are created by the students and demonstrate knowledge of core content through illustrated essays, charts, maps etc.

**Semester Written Evaluations:** This evaluation format has been replaced by the Standards Based Report Card, but may be used in certain situations such as with Special Ed students. It is a document with written observations by the Educational Coordinator with specialty teacher and parent input for the elementary student. These evaluations include anecdotal evidence of emotional, social and cognitive development, and a record of lessons completed by the pupil. It will list the key outcomes for the semester and how well the goals were met. Statements about growth achieved and recommended areas for future focus are integrated.

**Standards Based Report Cards:** at semester end. Achievement of grade level content standards in Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science as well as Social Skills are ranked from emerging, developing to mastery. A ranking of “developing” is considered passing.

**Progress Reports** for High School students at mid term and semester end **Report Cards** are issued with traditional grades, units and comments.

**Quizzes and chapter review tests:** are incorporated as part of the curriculum. Educational Coordinators quiz the student on the periods work, either orally or written, during the regular meetings.

**MAP:** Measures of Academic Performance published by NWEA, Northwest Evaluation Association, a non-profit corporation, is a California State adopted alternative standardized test for the ASAM schools which is aligned with California Content Standards. However, its purpose is to help focus instruction in Reading, English Language Usage, Math and Science.

**Portfolios:** a year end presentation and discussion in which the student, parent, and teacher choose examples of the student’s work based on certain criteria that demonstrate how and what the student has learned over the past year.

**Student Self-Assessment:** a survey in which the student identifies the meaningful learning that has occurred through the year, as well as, if appropriate, a reflection on their own effort.

**Performances and Open House:** performances in the music, drama, dance and all-school open houses are held once or twice a year, where parents and members of the community have the opportunity to observe student work. School district members, administrators, and teachers may attend these events, assessing the quality of work for themselves.

**Surveys and questionnaires:** are completed by pupils, staff and parents providing feedback on both established and developing programs.

### **California Standardized Test and California High School Exit**

**Exam:** The Charter School shall meet the statewide performance standards and shall conduct annual pupil assessments required pursuant to Education Code Sections 60605 and 60851, including the STAR test and the CAHSEE. The STAR is comprised of the writing test for 4th and 7th graders offered March and the multiple choice for 2nd through 11 grade usually conducted for two weeks at the end of April and first of May. The CAHSEE, for 10th graders and above until passed, is a high stakes exam required to required for a California High School Diploma. The test is conducted each spring for 10<sup>th</sup> graders, twice for 11th graders and up to three times per year for 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

Student progress is assessed by use of student work, portfolios, MAP test results and annual STAR scores and CAHSEE results, if applicable. Included in portfolio will be a sample of the child's main lesson books, various pieces of art, and practice papers. The Charter School acknowledges that exit outcomes and performance goals may need to be modified over time.

Parent conferences occur regularly (at a minimum during both the first and second semesters), for younger students typically every 20 school days, and at least every 10 days for high school students. Furthermore, each class teacher, or Educational Coordinator, shall prepare at the end of each school semester a standards based report card with narrative comments is prepared for elementary students. High School students receive a traditional grades and units report card.

### **D3 & D4: Assessment and Accountability**

*To what extent does the school with the support of the district and community have an assessment and monitoring system to determine student progress toward achievement of the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results?*

*To what extent does the assessment of student achievement in relation to the academic standards and the expected schoolwide learning results drive the school's program, its regular evaluation and improvement and usage of resources?*

## Assessment and Monitoring Process

For a detailed description of La Vida's testing and monitoring program see pp. 16-31 of this report.

Through the analysis of La Vida's three-pronged assessment approach, the staff and board altered several onsite classes to address areas of weakness and to help support struggling students. These classes include the CAHSEE prep classes for Writing and Math. The classes are also open to middle school students who ordinarily do not attend Tuesday classes. There are currently two eighth grade students attending the CAHSEE math prep class and this is resulting in improvement in each student's math work.

In order to advance to the next grade level a student must, at a minimum; have completed at least 75% of the grade-level curriculum have accomplished 75% of the first and second semester goals as specified on the master agreement, have accomplished 75% of the State Content standards, with a minimum rating of "developing" for that grade level or as adjusted in sequence for those students utilizing a Waldorf curriculum.

A student not meeting these requirements shall be recommended by the Educational Coordinator to the Director for possible retention in accordance with Charter School policy regarding student retention.

## Modifications Based on Assessment Results

The most important modification made to La Vida's High School onsite curriculum is the CAHSEE prep class offered every Tuesday from 10:00 am to 11:30 am. It was obvious that many of the students were having issues with passing the CAHSEE and that the math scores were well below the State Standards. La Vida observed that it required more than simple tutoring to get the students on track.

As a result, La Vida hired a professional consultant, Jeff Simpson. Jeff is a retired math teacher who has spent the past several years on a program he calls Master Learning Systems, MLS. He's published over 12 text books, all for the purpose of making math easy for students. According to his website, "Our approach is grounded in guided discovery tasks, narrowly focused so that relevant math concepts and procedures are noticed, reinforced, and remembered. They significantly reduce fear and frustration, replacing them with success." This is done through manipulatives.

These "manipulatives" are on paper, so they are cost effective, convenient, and everyone can construct and experience the math for themselves. Guided by the teacher, students develop a concrete feeling for 4 groups of 7 and can compare that with 5 groups, and 11 groups, and 2 groups of 7.

Once students are oriented to the graphics, this paper manipulative can travel with them to support homework or next week's assignments.

MLS enables students to notice mathematical relationships for themselves and build an accurate mental image or memory of those discoveries. By engaging their active power to notice – not their passive effort to remember what someone else noticed – MLS promotes both thinking skills and math-esteem.

Examples of how the system works:

- Students are given simple tasks and asked simple questions with which to explore the graphics:
- Cover all but the first row (week)
- Count how many days in one week
- Now show the second week
- Count how many days in that week
- How many days is that altogether?
- Can you predict how many days there will be in the third week (the fourth week)?
- How many days will that be altogether, in three (four) weeks? Check and see if you're right.
- Vacation is in 7 weeks. How many days do you think that is? Check and see if you're right. And so on down the page.

No explanations or answers are given. If a student is not sure or gives an incorrect answer, they're simply asked to show how they got that answer on the graphic. With guidance, they construct and predict amounts and correct themselves.

Jeff Simpsons classes use the services of two other teachers in guiding the class of CAHSEE prep students and there has been a marked improvement for those students who have taken the tests since being in this class.

## 4. SELF STUDY FINDINGS

### *E. School Culture and Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth*

#### **E1 School Culture and Student Support**

*To what extent does the school leadership employ a wide range of strategies to encourage parental and community involvement, especially with the teaching*

##### **Regular Parent Involvement:**

La Vida actively seeks communication between school and homes in order to support students and families in their schooling. Parents are encouraged to actively participate in the school community. La Vida has two parents actively sitting on the board and have a history of parents being on the board.

La Vida's parent involvement and procedures are easily found in the La Vida Charter School Family Handbook on page thirteen. The Family Handbook states "La Vida is a parent participation school. Parents considering the La Vida Charter School need to understand that the success of the school is based in large part on a strong parent body dedicated to helping the school meet its objectives in all areas. Parents placing a child in the school have responsibilities not necessarily associated with other public schools. First and foremost is a commitment to being your child's primary teacher. Parents who embrace and support the educational philosophy at home enhance the student's experience. Parents are encouraged to attend the Parent Education Seminars, and parent class meetings that will be held throughout the year".

##### **Evidence**

- Parents on La Vida Board
- Office Procedure sign ins
- Email

It is also noted that parents are asked to volunteer four hours per month or forty hours per school year. A volunteer binder located in the kitchen is kept to assist parents and guardians in recording their volunteer time or donations.

Parents are also provided Parent Classroom Volunteer/Observation slips which are given to the office. This form indicates what parent would like to volunteer, in what class, for what student, on what day and for how long. It also, requires the teacher's signature. This form helps to note who is on campus at what times as well as keep record of volunteer time and parent observations.

In the past La Vida has rented the Willits Community center every Tuesday for parents to teach parent lead activities and lessons. The elementary parents lead this Tuesday program and it was very successful at the time.

La Vida communicates with parents and solicits parent involvement in a variety of ways.

- Parents with email regularly correspond via email with teachers
- La Vida puts out a newsletter with information about the school, events and activities
- Homenotes and flyers,
- Orientation
- Beginning of the year Orientation Packets with calendar of the years events, test dates etc,
- Curriculum Fair
- Parent Teas, to allow parents to share with each other and the school and for support.
- Parent Student Handbook, High School Handbook, EC Meeting Prep checklist
- EC's are in regular contact with student and family via email, phone and one-on-one meetings.
- EC Staff meetings occur once a month. This group reviews school wide data, discusses the instructional programs on-site, and makes decisions about the use of curriculum to support student growth and instruction.
- La Vida's web site contains information about La Vida's programs, activities, curriculum and contact information for teachers and administrators.
- School wide events: La Vida's Thankfulness Feast and Performance, and Open House are opportunities for parents to get a sense of the programs offered at La Vida as well as to visit and talk with the staff and teachers.

## Evidence

- Volunteer Sign in/Record Sheets
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- Tuesday Program:
- Parent Lead Activities
- 
- Field Trips
- Odysseyware
- On-Site Classes
- Spelling Bee, Haiku Contest, Field Trips, Science Fair, Cherishing Youth day, Pastels on the Plaza
- Community Service
- Work Experience
- First Week Discussion Sheet and Packet
- Student Success Team (SST) Meeting
- Volunteer Opportunity Notices
- Workshops
- Parent Teas
- Graduation
- Personal Electives
- Parent Lead Committees
- On-Site Activities: Peace Day, Field Day, Thankfulness Feast and Performance, Open House
- EC Staff meetings
- La Vida Website
- La Vida Newsletter

The school has worked to provide a welcoming community and draw parents into the educational process of their student while supporting their individual needs and interests.

### **Use of Community Resources:**

La Vida has a number of community resources to thoroughly meet our students needs and support their education.

Some of these resources are:

- Jeff Simpson, Mastery Learning Systems (teachers are learning method as he teaches the students)
- Golden Rule Community on Ridgewood Ranch
- The Butler Cherry project,
- United Peace Relief, Creer / Believe, (all co fundraising) same with Ukiah natural Foods,
- California Charter School Association,
- Alliance for Public Waldorf Schools,
- Mendocino Comm. College,
- For several years the Nurturing Arts Program was offered at the school on weekends by Mary Bowen, Waldorf master teacher.
- Currently master teacher Lisa Wilde is offering monthly craft classes, open to parents & staff.
- Speakers: Dr.Lisa Harvey on Vision Learning Disorders, David Rosen and Judy --- on Dyslexia, Dodie Merrit on Differentiated instruction.
- Parent Run specialty classes
- For Safety: Sherriff Tom Allman & County Emergency operations Coordinator Paris Greenleaf.
- Fire extinguisher company did a training on how to use Fire extinguishers,
- Several years of CPR certification at in-service trainings.
- Risk Management Officer for insurance company inspects for safety liabilities every two years and he commends us on our improvements and conscientiousness

### **Parent/Community and Student Achievement:**

Due to the nature and design of our school the teachers are able to meet and talk with parents every twenty school days for elementary and every ten school days for high school students. Communication about student achievement of the academic standards as well as ESLRs takes place at these meetings. La Vida sponsors Parent Teas which are another discussion forum for parents to learn about achievement through La Vida's co-curricular program.

## E-2: School Culture and Student Support

*To what extent is the school a safe, clean, and orderly place that nurtures learning?*

*To what extent is the culture of the school characterized by trust, professionalism, high expectations for all students, and a focus on continuous school improvement?*

The La Vida Charter School is located on the beautiful and historic Ridgewood Ranch in the heart of rural Mendocino County. The school itself is an old ranch style home that sits on a lovely spot with views of the pastures and hills around the little valley. La Vida's environment is a nurturing homelike school that supports learning. Trees and benches allow for students to study and enjoy the outdoors, with plenty of space to view the every changing scenery.

### **Safe, Clean and Orderly Environment:**

La Vida is a safe campus. Campus safety is supported by the administrator and staff. La Vida's small size and small population allows for teachers and faculty to develop strong relationships with students that permit them to notice when conflicts are arising or anything is amiss.

La Vida annually updates their Safety Plan and first aid kits that guides and supports the systems for creating and maintaining a safe campus as well as a plan for natural disaster or other major emergency situations. All staff are required to read the Faculty Handbook so that all teachers are aware of emergency procedures and safety systems at La Vida. Monthly fire drills and practice allow students and faculty the preparation and awareness they need to follow our safety plan in case of an emergency.

In the La Vida Family Handbook it clearly outlines the playground rules and etiquette as well as the behavior and consequences for students. This information can be found on pages fourteen and fifteen Parents and students expected to read through the handbook and be familiar with the expectations. At orientation La Vida staff reviews the behavior and consequences with parents and students.

### **Evidence**

- Peaceful/Homelike Environment
- On-site classes
- Fire Drills/Earth Quake Drills
- Safety Procedures and Emergency Operations Plan and Manuals
- Regular updates to first aid kits
- Student Surveys Reflect a sense of safety at la Vida
- Review of school rules and safety

In student survey's it is frequently noted by students that they feel safe at the school and cared for.

La Vida teachers make students feel safe by emphasizing safety both physically and emotionally. Teachers who instruct courses dealing with physical movements such as La Vida's Movement Course and Drama use a variety of safety activities like the 'Safety Circle' to promote and encourage safety in the courses. The Safety Circle helps to teach students what is considered safe behavior and what is not. Students are also given instruction on what to do if they or a peer is not being safe. In the first and second grade class empathy and community building is being taught using the Second Step Program curriculum. This program is being implemented to assist the students in their social development and help create a community of compassion and empathy.

At the beginning of each year and periodically throughout the year La Vida teachers and staff review the La Vida School Rules with the students. In the first and second grade students act out the rules and assist each other in learning the school rules and what they mean. The La Vida school rules are "Be Safe, Be Respectful and Be Responsible."

### **High Expectations/Concern for Students:**

Students K-12 are encouraged and supported to participate in daily chores to help maintain the schools cleanliness. By encouraging students to work as a team to keep our school clean we are working to develop peer relationships as well as a sense of responsibility and pride in the school. Students gladly participate in the simple chores and show great pride in La Vida.

### **Atmosphere of Trust, Respect and Professionalism:**

A climate of caring for students is evident, equally balanced with a climate of holding students accountable for appropriate behaviors. Faculty have had the opportunity to work with Penni Sparks, a noted educational expert, during numerous Professional Development trainings to help teachers develop systems in their classrooms that hold students accountable for positive behaviors, create a climate of safety and positive learning. The ultimate goal is to create classrooms in which all students feel safe to take risks with their learning and allow for growth and development of each student.

### **Evidence**

- School Rules: Be Safe, Be Responsible and Be Respectful
- La Vida Faculty Handbook

- Student Chores

- Professional Development to support School culture with Penni Sparks

### **E-3: School Culture and Student Support**

*To what extent do all students receive appropriate support along with an individualized learning plan to help ensure academic success?*

#### **Support Services and Learning:**

La Vida is a small community, due to our size we are more like a family. We know that students who feel connected to school and engaged are more likely to be academically successful.

Our staff organizes an orientation each year and provides ongoing support and information to both parents and students.

#### **Co-Curricular Activities:**

La Vida offers a variety of all school field trips and activities that are designed to not only bring the high school students and junior high together but to also introduce the elementary students and create a sense of community and support.

In the fall La Vida has a Thankfulness Feast. Classrooms are transformed into showcases for work and projects as well as food. Each class is assigned to a category of food and parents and students create a dish to share from their heritage. Teachers, staff, parents and students are welcome to enjoy the feast as well as participate in the performance. Various all school field trips help to create positive interaction among the grades and families of our small school.

At the end of the year La Vida puts on a Field Day and carnival. Students and families are encouraged to compete and participate in a variety of fun and engaging field activities to sack races and water balloon toss and then enjoy a snack, face painting and ring toss games.

These various activities create bonds with other students and with the faculty at La Vida

#### **Student Perceptions:**

Through frequent EC meetings and activities the staff have been able to discuss with students their understanding and awareness of the student support services available at La Vida.

#### **Evidence**

- Educational Coordinator
  - Orientation
  - Parent(s)/Guardians
  - On-Site Staff
- 
- All School Field Trips/Activities
  - SST Meetings
  - Summer Orientation
  - High school field trip: Local hotel that uses alternative energy
  - On-Site Activities: Ice cream social, Thankfulness Feast, End of year Carnival and Field Day

### **Areas of Strength**

- Community involvement and curricular/co-curricular activities
- Personalized education
- Safe/Clean Environment
- School perception data indicates that students and parents feel safe
- Qualified, caring and dedicated teachers and administrative staff
- Inspiring environment surrounded by nature with an historical backdrop
- Centrally located in Mendocino County
- Wonderful Students
- Alternative curriculum
- Blended approach to education: Waldorf/homeschool/classroom/outings

### **Areas to Grow**

- Streamlined orientation for new teachers
- More financial resources for supplies and equipment



# 5. Action Plan

**LA VIDA CHARTER SCHOOL**

January, 2010  
WASC Leadership Committee

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## 5. Action Plan

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Based on the findings of the self study with regards to the academic needs, the standards and the Expected Schoolwide Learning Results, the following goals and action steps has been developed for future work.

1. Goal: To establish a stable core community of families and staff.
2. Goal: To show 85% growth for students through the MAP.
3. Goal: To help students achieve success accomplishing all High School requirements with a California High School Diploma as an outcome.
4. Goal: To help students develop skills to succeed with their abilities in Mathematics, enabling them to achieve in life.
5. Goal: To help students understand cause and effect, where we come from and where we are going as individuals, as families, as communities, as a country and as a planet.
6. Goal: That teachers embrace and accomplish the school's vision in providing a Waldorf inspired and standards based education to all K-12 students; and that they find joy in their personal and professional development in accomplishing these goals.

1. Action Step: Triage support for new parents. Experienced person to call new person.

Leadership Team: Board Parents, Director

Resource & Professional Development: Office support

Time Line: For August 2010

Assessment: Contact logs, Parent Tea turn out

2. Action Step: Annual Home Visits for all students and more often for at risk students.

Leadership Team: EC Faculty

Resource & Professional Development: Office support

Time Line: Ongoing

Assessment: Contact logs

3. Action Step: Create a Yahoo Groups through school website

Leadership Team: Director, IT Technician, One Staff, One Parent

Resource & Professional Development: Set up, Training on use, Staff correspondence overseer.

Time Line: by June 2010

Assessment: Report on use and content by staff member, survey feedback from parents.

4. Action Step: Create course for California High School Proficiency Exam  
Leadership Team: High School EC's and Director  
Resource & Professional Development: Revenue for time, Materials and information dissemination materials for teachers and students.  
Time Line: by January 2011  
Assessment: Product proof

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5. Action Step: Master the MAP: mandatory faculty involvement during & immediately after the testing session.  
Leadership Team: Director and MAP Coordinator with EC's  
Resource & Professional Development: Annual training, & as needed, Office Support  
Time Line: March 2010  
Assessment: Quarterly Review check in, Teacher activity
6. Action Step: Education Informational Workshop on the MAP for Parents  
Leadership Team: Director, MAP Coordinator  
Resource & Professional Development  
Time Line: October 2010  
Assessment: Event Occurrence and Quarterly Review Check-in
7. Action Step: Create a unit on Testing Success for all students starting in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, delivered at the same time though out the school.  
Leadership Team: Faculty Roundtable  
Resource & Professional Development: Meeting time, supplies  
Time Line: begin March 2010  
Assessment: Product Proof, staff meetings, Quarterly Check-in
8. Action Step: Improve MAP testing environment  
Leadership Team: IT Technician, MAP Coordinator, Director  
Resource & Professional Development: IT Tech time, Office support,  
Time Line: March 2010  
Assessment: Product Proof

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9. Action Step: Continue with CAHSEE Prep plan and use of weekly tests from CAHSEE release questions.  
Leadership Team: High School Math Team  
Resource & Professional Development: Supplies  
Time Line: On going  
Assessment: Quarterly check-in and student scores.

10. Action Step: Continue to develop extrinsic and intrinsic incentives for CAHSEE.  
add Graph of improvement in math class,  
Leadership Team: High School Math Team and Director  
Resource & Professional Development: Time and Supplies  
Time Line: Ongoing  
Assessment: Product Proof, student scores
11. Action Step: Standardized the process for Personal Learning Goal Setting procedure for all students.  
Leadership Team : Roundtable  
Resource & Professional Development: Meeting time and class time, goal goal setting resources.  
Time Line: November 2010  
Assessment: Product Proof, Quarterly Check-in
12. Action Step: Investigate other CAHSEE prep options such as online, XL Prep etc.  
Leadership Team: Director, Office support, and HS Faculty members TBD  
Resource & Professional Development: Time and Revenue, perhaps training  
Time Line: by October 2010  
Assessment: Product Proof Quarterly Check-in
13. Action Step: Continue to develop Mastery Learning System and bring in additional Professional Development Training for Teachers.  
Leadership Team: Math Team, Director  
Resource & Professional Development: Professional resources, Materials, Training Time,  
Time Line: Ongoing and for August 2010 inservice, have a new tool.  
Assessment: Quarterly Check-ins, Product Proof
14. Action Step: Mandatory math time during all morning lessons.  
Leadership Team: Faculty Roundtable  
Resource & Professional Development: Materials, Time  
Time Line: ongoing  
Assessment: Quarterly check ins, syllabi, observations
15. Action Step: Develop Peer Tutoring program; time and structure.  
Leadership Team: Faculty team TBD  
Resource & Professional Development: Time, materials  
Time Line: in place by October 2010  
Assessment: Product Proof, Meeting discussion, student feedback,
16. Action Step: Develop Parent Workshop on teaching math and history.  
Leadership Team: Director, faculty members TBD, Special Ed faculty.  
Resource & Professional Development: Time, materials  
Time Line: First Workshop Fall 2010  
Assessment: Quarterly- checkin, Product Proof

17. Action Step: Develop a Math in Life component.

Leadership Team: Faculty Roundtable

Resource & Professional Development: Research Time, Materials

Time Line: Roll out Fall 2010

Assessment: Product Proof, Quarterly check in

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18. Action Step: Develop a Bring a Question Campaign to TR Tuesday history seminar.

Use test release questions as trivia.

Leadership Team: HQT Social Studies teacher with EC support

Resource & Professional Development: Time

Time Line: Ongoing, start Feb.2010

Assessment: Student feedback, Quarterly check-in

19. Action Step: Acquire a standards based history test

Leadership Team: Director, office staff

Resource & Professional Development: Research Time and Revenue

Time Line: by June 2010

Assessment: Product Proof

20. Action Step: Develop History and Life activities; focused field trips, guest speakers as well as interactive, experiential lessons.

Leadership Team: Faculty Round Table, HQT Social Studies.

Resource & Professional Development: Research Time, Waldorf inspired professional development, Revenue

Time Line: Ongoing

Assessment: Syllabi, Quarterly check in, Staff Meetings

21. Action Step: Research to acquire a standards based history supplement for home study.

Leadership Team: Director and Office support

Resource & Professional Development: Research Time and Revenue

Time Line: For August 2010

Assessment: Product Proof, Quarterly Check-in

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22. Action Step: Develop strand of bringing standards through creative learning objectives.

Leadership Team: Roundtable

Resource & Professional Development: Collaboration Time,

Time Line: August 2010 inservice and ongoing thereafter

Assessment: Event is Proof, Quarterly check-in

23. Action Step: Create a Quarterly accountability, check-in process regarding expectations Educational objectives.  
 Leadership Team: Director with Faculty Roundtable  
 Resource & Professional Development: Time  
 Time Line: May 2010 EC Meeting for Fall 2010 roll out.  
 Assessment: Product Proof
24. Action Step: Develop a check off standards aligned map system for the benchmarks in the charter.  
 Leadership Team: Faculty Roundtable  
 Resource & Professional Development: Meeting Time,  
 Time Line: Dec 2010  
 Assessment: Product Proof, EC meetings.
25. Action Step: Finish the standards map for High School English.  
 Leadership Team: Director and Faculty Team TBD  
 Resource & Professional Development: Time, some research time professional consultation.  
 Time Line: by June 30, 2010  
 Assessment: Product Proof, check ins.
26. Action Step: Develop Teacher created Training Modules for La Vida processes such as Report Writer, paperwork, MAP, High School elements, electives, economics project.  
 Leadership Team: Faculty Roundtable  
 Resource & Professional Development: Time and materials  
 Time Line: For Fall 2011  
 Assessment: Quarterly check-in, EC meetings, Product Proof





