

**MIDTERM REVIEW
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

FOR

La Vida Charter School

3/2/10 – 3/4/10

2/25/13 – 2/26/13

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Introduction

La Vida Charter School is located on the Ridgewood Ranch, between Willits and Ukiah on Highway 101 in Mendocino County. Mendocino County covers a large geographic area but with a small population of 87,553. La Vida Charter School serves all of Mendocino County and extends to bordering areas of Lake and Sonoma counties. Sonoma State University, located one and a half hours south on Hwy 101, is the closest 4 year college. Mendocino Community College is in Ukiah and has satellite centers throughout Mendocino and Lake Counties.

La Vida's mission is to offer an Independent Study/Home School, Waldorf inspired alternative for residents of Mendocino County and surrounding areas seeking a Non-Classroom option. La Vida serves grades K through 12 and is WASC accredited with a maximum enrollment of 100. La Vida offers a unique Waldorf inspired program with on-site classes two to three days per week (depending on the grade). La Vida offers academics in the morning and specialty classes in the afternoon such as Spanish, Games, Art, Music, Drama, Field Science, Handwork, and more. La Vida makes an effort to bring a social curriculum inspired by Waldorf education in an atmosphere of respect and acceptance.

La Vida provides a safe, nurturing environment for its students and has had a zero suspension rate in the last three years. In continuing the sense of community, La Vida requires students to attend a day of seminars, cooking, and community service once a month.

For the past three years in the *End of Year Report* to Willits Unified, the school has reported 75% change of population each year. The changes are from year to year and within the year from trimester to trimester, the student population effectively creates a distinct school within a year because student mobility is so high. Even though retaining students is the most desirable scenario, it is clear that the school must be adaptive to the transient population and make the most of the short time students are at La Vida.

La Vida enrolls many students with IEP's, students, 17% this year (13%, 16% 14% previous years) La Vida enjoys an excellent reputation in the community and many families come because they have heard someone they know express a positive experience at La Vida.

Student Population

In comparison to the demographics of Mendocino County, the La Vida population is whiter (county 68%, **school 83%**, state 40%), a little more well educated using Bachelor's degrees (22%, **33%**, 30%), poorer (free and reduced lunch (county 57%, **school 76%** , state 56%) and has the same equal parts of male and female.

Significant Changes since last WASC Visit (2009):

In response to the economic times, La Vida cut back on programs and consolidated teachers (from fourteen to ten). Enrollment increased last year with a pilot program being initiated at an isolated community of Covelo. At this time La Vida, employs 11 teachers and serves 97 students.

P-2 ADA

84.35 ADA in 2011-2012 (Prior Years: 67.9 in 10/11, 56.94 in 09/10, 67.7 in 08/09, 82.84 in 07/08)

The school switched from a two semester schedule to **three trimesters** in order to provide parents with more feedback and to allow students to start over if they had fallen behind.

The school has continued to develop the **Teacher of Record (TR) Tuesday program**, a program created to accommodate the mandates of No Child Left Behind, NCLB, which required students to meet with a highly qualified teacher in all core subjects. With a focus on science and history, students attend seminars in those subjects on the last Tuesday of the month. The teacher of record evaluates the student's progress and consults with the overseeing educational coordinator.

Professional Development

A two year program of **Teacher Learning Communities, TLC**, was initiated this year to support teachers who in turn, support students' educational growth, using the school's formative assessment, the MAP, and Student Learning Profiles, our bridge to the common core. Using a best practices model for teacher learning communities, teachers came to a monthly meeting, work collaboratively on focus topics, create action plans and later share feedback on their progress. Working more fully with the MAP test results was one of the school's WASC action plans.

Systems

Two years ago, (2010-2011) the school adopted and implemented a new student information system, the **School Pathways Sis**. It was a good move for the school since the daughter program Report Writer for independent study paperwork was already being used with success.

Follow-Up Process

The school rewrote the action plan as recommended previously by the visiting committee to indicate clearer correlations of goals and steps and to include timelines. These revisions were submitted to the WASC office. The visiting team has some concerns with the goals as written

For two years, monitoring of the action plan happened twice a year, at the summer in-service and in the spring quarterly check-in. At the in-service, the faculty as a group reviewed, discussed progress, and identified action items to focus on that year. This current year was a little different. During the December faculty staff meeting, the teachers worked in small groups where each group closely analyzed and reviewed the progress of assigned actions steps

Each year the school reviews and reports on its progress in achieving its goals in an end of the year report submitted to Willits Unified School District. The school did not create interim adjusted action plans each year as suggested in the WASC renewal report instructions.

School's Progress on Critical Areas for Follow-Up

.Goal 1: (*Retention*) To establish a stable core community of families and staff.

La Vida took steps to create a stable core community of students implementing programs for parents of new students and at risk students. The school explored the idea of a course designed for passing the California High School Proficiency Exam but discovered that the state already provided a guide book.

School leadership reviewed hiring and recruiting policies of teachers in response to the critical area of follow up. Although no plan was implemented, it seems that teacher attrition has declined since the last visit.

Goal 2: (*Academic Growth*) To show 85% growth for students through the MAP.

Faculty has been sporadic in downloading MAP results. Eighty five percent of students participated in MAP assessment in the 2011-2012 school year. A spreadsheet was developed to show individual student scores on the STAR and MAP. Currently Teacher Learning Communities are in use to address this goal. Parent education sessions on the MAP have been unsuccessful to date. Materials have been prepared to education parents on the MAP. A Testing for Success packet has been created by a faculty member and distributed to students each year. A school wide test preparation focus occurs each year in

March and April. Visiting team witnessed students being tutored in math. Focus on instruction and curriculum as well as mandating the MAP should be looked at in order to achieve student growth.

Goal 3: (*High School Graduation*) To help students achieve success accomplishing all High School requirements with a California High School Diploma as an outcome.

The strategies set by the school to meet this goal in their action plan are aimed primarily at passing the CAHSEE. There was an effort made to standardize the process of setting learning goals for students but that effort was met with marginal results. There is a renewed effort this year towards standardizing the setting of learning goals for students based on the work of Jennifer Fox.

Although not mentioned in the action plan, one of the critical areas for follow up was to bring all curriculums and course work in line with the state standards. La Vida has made a concerted effort in aligning the course work with the California state standards and should be commended.

Goal 4: (*Math Improvement*) To help students develop skills to succeed with their abilities in Mathematics, enabling them to achieve in life.

Teachers had professional development training in the Mastery Learning System as well as the Common Core Math Standards. Teachers were unable or unwilling to use the Mastery Learning System methods with students. The school will try again to introduce this method as it seems to align with student learning profiles. Parent workshops in this method are also scheduled for this year. All on-site classes now have mandatory math time in the morning. Peer tutoring has been tried with some success. A Math in Life component is being developed. Math teachers are working on Math in Life lesson plans for the remainder of the year, assumedly for on-site students.

Goal 5: (*Social Studies Improvement*) 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.

In response to the critical area of follow up of aligning curriculum and course work with the state standards, La Vida set goals of acquiring a standards based history test for high school students and acquiring a standards based history supplement for home study. Both of those goals were met.

Goal 6: (*Teacher Buy-In*) 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.

The ESLRs were expanded by adding four; however the four new ESLRs represent processes not outcomes. The development of strands that incorporate state standards through creative learning objectives has been an ongoing and important component of the on-site program. A quarterly check-in process has been developed in order to review the action plan, the steps needed to further the goals and the accomplishments made. These meetings have been a productive and positive component of the school's ongoing growth. The school began a standards map for all elementary and high school courses, but decided not to pursue completion after learning of the Common Core Standards implementation. The standards map for high school English was completed and submitted to the district. Teachers have been involved in presenting workshops for each other in areas they determined were important including paperwork processes, Waldorf philosophy and Common Core Standards. Various standards aligned curriculum are available for students at all grade levels. Odyssey Ware (an online curriculum), and Progress in Math are widely used. The school's core curriculum, Oak Meadow is aligned at the upper grades. As the shift to common core continues, the offerings will need to be continually reviewed for alignment.

Goal 7: (*Technology*) Pursue grant opportunities to update and expand technology.

Although grant opportunity were not pursued as recommended, La Vida did replace most of the computers on campus with newer, faster devices.

Recommendations

The visiting team saw no decline in the schools areas of strength including a safe, supportive environment for individualized learning. The team saw a concerted effort to make the curriculum standards based.

It is the recommendation of the review team that these critical areas of follow up be addressed:

1. La Vida continues to explore strategies to retain quality teachers including non-monetary strategies.
2. The staff clarifies their ESLR's so that they reflect student outcomes instead of processes.
4. The staff begins to develop indicators that correspond with the ESLRs.
3. The action plan is reviewed for a more direct correlation between the sub-goals and the main goals.

In addition those areas of follow up, the visiting team recommends that La Vida continued their preparation for the upcoming Common Core Standards including a review of technology in light of the proposed assessment pieces.

