

Report
of the
Woodside School District
Strategic Planning Committee
Submitted
to the
Governing Board
June 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2006 the District convened a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of parent and staff representatives and charged it with the task of bringing the Board recommendations that would guide the District over the next five years.

The Committee met regularly from early February through late May. It reviewed test scores and fiscal data, held a series of forums to solicit input and conducted a survey of staff and parents. After reflecting on the information, the Committee recommended that the District retain, with slight modifications, its current Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles. In addition, the Committee recommended the four Long-Range Initiatives below as focal points for action over the next five years.

- Improve the use of technology, for classroom instruction, student learning and communication with parents.

- Continue efforts at Woodside School to create a strong sense of community

(including students, staff and parents) within the school setting. Behavioral

expectations and a clearly stated value system need to be regularly communicated

with the entire school community. A clear set of procedures should be defined, communicated and consistently implemented. Clarity regarding all aspects of

behavior is a pivotal key to success.

- In order to address the needs of high achieving students and struggling students (including English Learners), implement curriculum enhancements and strategies including, but not limited to, differentiated learning and alternative grouping practices.

- Strengthen articulation both vertically across grade lines and horizontally among the classes in each

grade. A well articulated and coordinated program at all grade levels will significantly enhance the program. By providing academic consistency, strong alignment with standards and smooth transitions between the grades, Woodside School will achieve its goal of academic excellence.

Committee believed that the following elements are important to consider as implementation proceeds:

- Woodside School has done a great deal of work on differentiated instruction; it is a powerful tool for helping students and therefore staff should continue to refine and extend its use
- The Board should adopt the recommendations of the Math Committee, which it has just received
- The school should evaluate all curriculum, including K-5 science and 6-8 language arts, and determine applicable best practices
- The District should utilize the Strategic Planning survey results as a source of information to help guide specific curriculum enhancements
- The current art program is excellent, but additional resources are needed to enable it to grow
- Provide support to staff for implementation of the initiatives. This might include professional development, working with mentors, etc.
- Evaluation is a critical part of the plan, so that the Board can assure the community that its resources are being well used
- The District will need to communicate effectively about all its initiatives – what it is doing, why, how and the manner in which success will be measured

Details about the Committee's work are found in the attached Report and its Appendices.

INTRODUCTION

The Woodside School District has employed a practice of developing five-year Strategic Plans to provide guidance to the district's annual goals, activities and budget planning. The two most recent Strategic Plans were developed in 1996 and 2001.

In January 2006 the Board approved the concept of convening a Strategic Planning Committee, and established a timeline that called for the Committee to begin work in early February and to present its Report to the Board in June.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Superintendent convened a Strategic Planning Committee that included parents, teachers and administrators. The members of the Committee are shown below:

Toni Allen, Teacher

Jason Blum, Teacher

Gordon Collett, Teacher

Wendy Crandall, Parent

Liz Dressel, Parent

Carol Hamilton, Parent

Harlen Hansen, Teacher

Kathy Jones, Teacher

Stephanie Nash, Parent

Mary Pinkus, Parent

Bob Sherman, Vice Principal

Dan Vinson, Superintendent

Ginger Waters, Teacher

Peter Burchyns, Facilitator – San Mateo County Office of Education

Note: Ellen Ablow was originally a member of the Committee, but left it when she was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Board.

MEETING SCHEDULE

The Committee held meetings on the following dates:

February 9, 2006

March 2, 2006

March 9, 2006

March 16, 2006

March 30, 2006

April 6, 2006

April 20, 2006

May 11, 2006

May 25, 2006

In addition, during the month of February the Committee organized two parent forums, a staff forum and a Board forum to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to provide input about what they value and how they think the district is currently functioning.

The Appendices contain details on the Committee's meetings, the input at the forums and the responses to the staff and parent surveys.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

At its first meeting, the Committee began by brainstorming what it thought were possible issues that might need review. The results included (see Appendix B-1 for details):

- academic issues, including the future of art, music, physical education and spelling;
- differentiation to meet the different needs of learners;
- school culture and climate;
- technology; and
- professional development

The Committee reviewed summary information about student performance and district finances (Appendix B-2). On the whole, the school's academic performance is at a very high level and its financial condition is sound.

The Committee also reviewed the input from the various forums. Although the individual comments covered over a wide range of topics and included various perspectives, the Committee drew the following general conclusions:

- People seem to be "on the same page."
- The overall perception is that things are working well – the suggested improvements are not major issues.
- There are high expectation and the desire to add programs. This will require the district to make decisions about "breadth versus depth," and to identify and focus on its priorities. There will be a need to determine how much can fit into the day.
- One issue to address is how to challenge and stimulate the accelerated learner.
- Due to the variety of programs, there is some tension between classroom versus pullout activities.
- Differentiated instruction is needed to help deal with students on the lower and upper ends of the achievement scale.
- People perceive that the fine arts programs are "maxed out."
- Promoting professional growth, development, evaluation and articulation is important.

The Committee used the forum input to help it develop a survey to the staff and community. While that was happening, the Committee reviewed the District's existing Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles. The consensus of the Committee was that the District was on the right track and that only minor modifications were needed. The revised statements appear in the last section of this Report, below.

The Committee next analyzed the responses to the multiple-choice items on the parent and staff surveys, and drew the following conclusions:

- The parent and staff ratings given to the effectiveness of the academic program with respect to their child (or all children, in the case of staff) were high.
- The ratings given to how well the academic program served specific sub-populations of students – high achievers, Special Education students, at-risk students who did not qualify for Special Education and English learners – were lower. The ratings for the first two groups were moderately lower, whereas for the last two they were significantly lower.
- Parent ratings for the health program were a little lower than those for other programs.
- The ratings for both keyboarding and technology were lower than those given to other areas.
- Parent ratings given to writing and spelling for grades 6-8 were lower than those given for K-5.
- Responses to how well the program promotes study skills were lower at grades 6-8 than for other grades.
- Parent responses for how well the program builds love of learning were lower for grades 6-8 than K-5.
- Responses for how well students can apply what they have learned were lower at grades 6-8 than for K-5.
- Only 63% of the staff strongly agreed/agreed that the program is well coordinated between grade levels (whereas 96% felt it was well coordinated within grade levels).
- Staff gave lower ratings to the effectiveness of overnight field trips than did parents (71% versus 86%).
- Both parents and staff gave relatively unfavorable ratings to the consistent enforcement of discipline policies by the administration.
- The ratings given to the administration's ability to deal appropriately with students were lower than average.
- Parents agreed or strongly agreed that the administration kept the school community well-informed (92%) but only 76% of the staff agreed/strongly agreed.
- Responses indicated that information does not seem to get out as well to parents of middle-school students as it does to parents of K-5 students.
- Parent ratings of the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences are lower at grades 6-8 than at K-5.
- Middle school parents like the school to use technology to keep them informed.
- Satisfaction with the adequacy of library resources is lower among parents of middle school students.
- Parents of middle school students appeared more concerned about behavior problems and bullying than do parents of younger students. Members of the group noted that the use of the TRIBES program had dropped off, and wondered if this was a factor in the concerns.

In addition, the Committee looked at the written comments the survey respondents made, and identified the following themes:

- Physical Safety/Campus Access

There were concerns expressed about the potential dangers to students that result from an open campus, to which any person has easy access.

- Behavior/Discipline Issues

Concerns were expressed about issues relating to clear expectations, inconsistent enforcement of rules, and communication.

- Articulation/Collaboration/Consistency

There were comments about the need for greater articulation and consistency in the academic program – both across classes at a grade level and between one grade and another.

- Field Trips

A number of comments were made about field trips. It was also noted that the survey responses showed a large majority of parents who responded were supportive of the field trips.

- Enrichment

There were several comments relating to “at-risk” students or to high achievers. The Committee discussed the fact that “enrichment” really is not the correct term for this category, since some comments addressed the need to provide support for struggling students and others dealt with the need to challenge high achievers.

- Creativity

There were comments about creativity in the instructional program being dependent upon the individual teacher.

- Communication

The theme of communication – the need for the school to be clear about what it is doing, why it does it, how it does it and how it knows it is doing it well – ran through many comments.

- Writing Program

There were comments about the need to improve the writing program, including grammar, vocabulary, report writing, etc.

- Technology

There were comments about keyboarding, the use of technology in the classroom, and the use of technology for communication.

CONTEXT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reviewed the data described above, the Committee reflected on the context within which it would make its recommendations to the Board. This context included:

- The District's Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles
- The Committee's original thoughts about potential issues and priorities
- Reports received – e.g., test scores and budget data
- Input from the staff and public forums
- The survey responses and comments
- The potential costs of implementing various new Long-Range Initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the Board adopt the Vision, Mission, Guiding Principles and Long-Range Initiatives presented below:

Vision

Woodside children are the town's greatest treasure. Educating and nurturing them is our contribution to the future.

Mission

Woodside School provides children from preschool through 8th grade a nurturing yet challenging school environment consistent with Woodside's cohesive, small town character. In collaboration with parents, we will instill in our students a

love of learning, respect and compassion for others, and a global, multicultural awareness. We attract and support highly motivated, talented and creative teachers. Sensitive to the individual needs and talents of each child, our teachers provide a balanced, engaging and academically rigorous education. The combination of a stimulating and innovative curriculum in a supportive environment will enable

students to achieve their highest potential. Our students will leave Woodside School eager and prepared to meet future academic and personal challenges.

Our Guiding Principles

- Pursue academic excellence

- Encourage each child to achieve his or her full potential
- Respect the individual talent, needs and learning styles of each child
- Value the arts, music, physical education and a second language as vital elements of our core curriculum
- Attract and support highly motivated, talented and creative teachers
- Foster communication and collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and the School Board
- Encourage innovation, intellectual risk taking and a life long love of learning
- Celebrate the imagination, humor and compassion inherent in all children
- Treasure the sense of community that our preschool through eighth grade campus provides
- Seek constant improvement of our school and its programs
- Encourage compassion for others through community and global service and outreach

Long-Range Initiatives

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The Committee recommends the four Long-Range Initiatives below as focal points for action over the next five years.

- Improve the use of technology, for classroom instruction, student learning and communication with parents.
- Continue efforts at Woodside School to create a strong sense of community (including students, staff and parents) within the school setting. Behavioral expectations and a clearly stated value system need to be regularly communicated with the entire school community. A clear set of procedures should be defined, communicated and consistently implemented. Clarity regarding all aspects of behavior is a pivotal key to success.
- In order to address the needs of high achieving students and struggling students (including English Learners), implement curriculum enhancements and strategies including, but not limited to, differentiated learning and alternative grouping practices.
- Strengthen articulation both vertically across grade lines and horizontally among the classes in each

grade. A well articulated and coordinated program at all grade levels will significantly enhance the program. By providing academic consistency, strong alignment with standards and smooth transitions between the grades, Woodside School will achieve its goal of academic excellence.

Finally, the Committee believes that the following elements are important to consider as the district proceeds with implementation:

- Woodside School has done a great deal of work on differentiated instruction; it is a powerful tool for helping students and therefore staff should continue to refine and extend its use
- The Board should adopt the recommendations of the Math Committee, which it has just received
- Evaluate all curriculum, including K-5 science and 6-8 language arts, and determine applicable best practices
- The District should utilize the survey results as a source of information to help guide specific curriculum enhancements
- The current art program is excellent, but additional resources are needed to enable it to grow
- Provide support to staff for implementation of the initiatives. This might include professional development, working with mentors, etc.
- Evaluation is a critical part of the plan, so that the Board can assure the community that its resources are being well used
- The District will need to communicate effectively about all its initiatives – what it is doing, why, how and the manner in which success will be measured

NEXT STEP

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee will attend the District Governing Board meeting on June 6, 2006 to make a short presentation and to respond to questions.

Appendix A

Prior Strategic Plans

Appendix B

Meeting Agendas, Materials and Notes

Appendix C

Notes from Parent, Staff and Board Forums

Appendix D

Survey Information