

SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

FOR

THE APTOS ACADEMY

**1940 Bonita Drive
Aptos, California 95003**

April 22-25, 2007

Visiting Committee Members

Carmen Kinkade, Chairperson
Teacher

P.O. Box 1094

Aptos CA 95001

Ms. Kathleen Focacci
Director

Venture Academy

P.O. Box 213030

Stockton, CA 95213-9030

Ms. Carmen Linares

Principal, Retired

3953 North Mariposa

Fresno, CA 93726

Chapter I: Student/Community Profile

The Aptos Academy is a non-profit, independent, non-denominational Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade community based school. The school began in 1994 with two students in Grade 2 and expanded to 35 students in Kindergarten through Grade 8 within the next few years. In the fall of 1999, with 66 students, the Academy moved into a new 4.5 acre campus, equipped with playgrounds, a soccer field, a science room, art room, modern classrooms, kitchen, and a theater. The Pre-Kindergarten Program was added in the fall of 2003. Enrollment at the school has shown a steady increase over time reaching a peak in the spring of 2006 with 121 students. The school has 111 students currently enrolled for the fall of 2006. *[Attachment A]*

The school is located in a “scenic corridor” of a rural/suburban area. The campus has a “park-like setting” with a soccer field, large blacktop for basketball and other sports activities as well as an area for gardening, archery, and horseback riding. The Pre-K and Kindergarten classes have their own playground with play equipment, a sandbox, and a shaded eating area. Aptos Academy provides a student teacher ratio of 7 to 1 which has attracted many families. P.E. classes are offered daily and the arts program is part of the core curriculum.

The majority of the students, 45.45%, come from Aptos itself. The percentage of families from the greater Watsonville area, which includes La Selva Beach, Corralitos, Royal Oaks, and Aromas, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, comprises 20% of the total school population. The next largest population comes from Santa Cruz at 19%. Scotts Valley, to the north contributes 3.6% and Salinas to the south contributes 2.7%.

	<u>2005-2006</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>
Aptos	44.6%	45.5%
Watsonville/ La Selva/ Corralitos	19.8%	20%
Capitola	4.9%	2.3%
Soquel	3%	1%
Santa Cruz	16.5%	19.1%
Scotts Valley	2%	3.6%

The ethnic distribution and population demographics approximates the local community. The student body is 51% female and 49% male. 77.3% of students are Caucasian, which closely approximates the US total of 78%, but less than the 92.5% ratio for the town of Aptos. The Hispanic

population of the school is currently 14.6%, an increase from 11% in 2003 and 10.6% in 2005. Although the school has a larger Hispanic population than the US average (12.73) we still do not approximate the population in the larger neighboring community of Watsonville which is 67.6% Hispanic. An active recruiting process to attract students from the community of Watsonville is ongoing. The black population currently stands at 2.7% while the Asian population stands a 1.8%.

	2002-2003	2005-2006	2006-2007
White	80%	84.4%	77.3%
Hispanic	11%	10.6%	14.6%
Asian	7%	1%	1.8%
African American	1%	1%	2.7%
Other	1%	3%	3.6%

In May of each year the students in grades 2 through 8 take the California Achievement Test. The student body as a whole does quite well on these tests with most classes testing a year or more above grade level. *[Attachment B]*

After attending Aptos Academy, graduates have transferred to a mixture of private and public schools. Follow-up indicates, the majority have transitioned successfully to the school of choice.

Chapter II: Progress Report

There were six areas for follow-up recommended by the initial visiting committee in 2004. The school has addressed each recommendation as follows:

1. The administration monitors the graduates’ academic and social progress so as to ensure the school’s programs are well articulated with both public and private feeder schools.

Since that visit the school has developed a questionnaire to follow-up on graduate’s academic and social progress. Information is gathered from the parents, students, and/or the destination school. The surveys provide information regarding entrance requirements for incoming students at various destination schools. Follow-up indicates, that the vast majority of Aptos Academy students have successfully transitioned to both private and public schools. Students with challenges, who needed extra help and tailored programs did well when matched with a school that could continue to meet their needs.

In response to survey results, the school has put more emphasis on teaching organization and study skills in the upper grades by providing each student with an academic planner and teaching them how to use it. A Study skills class was developed to teach notebook organization, “idea webbing” and team building. Students are increasingly being held accountable for their work product, and a new emphasis on completing Algebra I by 8th grade had been adapted

2. The administration and staff design a curriculum review cycle for each subject so as to ensure the instructional materials and curriculum content are current.

The principal, deans and staff meet informally throughout the year to ensure that current texts are meeting the student needs and more formally at the end of the year to discuss and look at various texts to augment with supplemental materials or replace the texts being used.

After last year’s review, the 3rd grade math program and the 7/8 grade science curriculum have been upgraded and aligned to state standards.

A new handwriting program was adopted this year: Handwriting Without Tears. Staff attended a handwriting workshop in February of last year, brought back sample materials, and shared the information with other staff. After a successful pilot, the program is now in place from Pre-K through 5th.

New curriculum was added to the upper grades to formalize the community service program, including lessons in ethics and tolerance. This pilot program has been successful as evidenced by the social progress of the students and the quality of their work product. Books will be purchased for a tolerance/ethics library for all grades to use.

Most faculty members have reviewed their own class curriculum and aligned subject matter to state standards.

3. The administration and school board encourage teachers to use the California Standards for teaching to plan their own professional development goals that are approved and supported by the administration.

The school is currently using a form which incorporates the California Standards for teaching as a self evaluation for the teaching staff. This is done after each trimester as a review and prompt to promote professional development.

The school set up a teacher training fund this year which will be used to send staff to the Asilomar Reading conference in January and for educational courses as requested by individual staff. The school also brings in specialists to introduce new concepts and enrichment to bi-monthly staff meetings. This year’s presentations included a Leadership Seminar and last year’s, a Brain Gym.

4. The school board and administration design a long-range plan for repairing, replacing, and upgrading the school plants and related facilities.

At the board meeting in September, future plans for the school facility and grounds were discussed and it was determined that no immediate upgrades were required. A formal maintenance schedule, including a \$550 a month budget for repairs, was adapted.

The school facility is relatively new, having been built in 1999. The building has a metal roof, the walls are stucco, and the landscaping needs minimal attention. The school is also fortunate to have in its employ a very talented Facilities Manager who is capable and willing to contribute his skills in many areas, including electrical, plumbing, mechanical, woodworking, painting, and landscaping. He can and has in the past made specialty items on request including drama sets, dunk tank, boat racing booth, cubbies, shelves, room reconfigurations, and work spaces.

In 2001-2002, the Kindergarten room was tiled and a library/computer area was created from two smaller rooms. A work shed was built by the facilities manager with donated materials in 2002-2003.

The next year carpet was applied to one wall of the auditorium, shade structures were constructed for the Pre-K play yard, and flagstone flooring was installed in the pottery area. The school recarpeted the auditorium, refurbished the chips in the Pre-K and general play area, and extended the flagstone flooring to the Pre-K planters and table areas the following year. These improvements were all financed through donations or partial donations. The sprinkler system was checked in 2005 and is due for another verification test in 2010. The fire extinguishers are recharged annually and the septic system is inspected bi-annually by an Environmental Health Engineer. A service contract exists for the elevator and wheel chair lift. The resealing of the parking lot and hardtop play areas is scheduled for completion this summer. Classroom painting is also performed in the summer, with rooms repainted based on need, and in sequence. The exterior surface of the building is pressure washed annually. The exterior walkways are resealed annually. The bulk of this work is accomplished by the Facilities Manager. The auditorium will need to be repainted within the next two years and the outside building within the next five years.

Enrollment will determine the need for an additional classroom within the next 10 years, Construction will be financed through donations from the school community.

5. The administration and staff implement a plan so as to ensure all students have access to a central catalogue system for the school's reference materials and fiction and nonfiction books.

Under the direction of a parent volunteer, Lora French, compilation of a computerized data base of all books from the school's reference library and classroom books has been initiated. The school administrator will update and monitor the database. The program will be accessible to staff and students. Books can be located by subject, author, or title and can be checked out when needed. The system will be in place by April 2007

6. The administration and school board consider scheduling in-service days and/or periodic minimum days for school-wide planning and professional development.

The staff meets formally at the beginning of each year for school-wide planning as well as during the school year twice monthly, and again at the end of the year for review, planning, and curriculum development. Informal meetings are frequent throughout the year and are assisted by the scheduling

of elective classes with elective teachers in separate classes. Computer, Spanish, Art, and Drama classes all meet in separate areas.

The idea of in-service and periodic minimum days was not met with approval by either the staff or the board. Many of the teachers have their own children attending the school and preferred the existing collaboration schedule. Guest speakers are invited to staff meetings or scheduled for evening meetings for professional development. The school also supports teachers attending seminars and sharing their expertise with the general staff. Continuing education has occurred in the areas of Brain Gym, Asilomar Reading Conference, CPR classes, Child Abuse Recognition, Handwriting, and Project Wet. The school also sponsors the Master Teacher program which engages all staff on a weekly basis.

The Board, in conjunction with the Parent Association, decided to add a teacher work day after the Winter Break to allow planning and collaboration time.

Chapter III: Self-Study Process

Comments on the school's self-study process with respect to the parameters.

The school used the self study process to evaluate their own program and to identify how much they had accomplished in the eight years the school has existed and where their next steps toward improving student learning would lead. Parents, teachers and administrators all participated to some extent in generating the information in the self-study.

1. The involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the self study.

The self study strongly affirms the involvement and collaboration of all staff, parents and business/community groups in the self-study process. Multiple surveys distributed to parents and students generated valuable information regarding satisfaction with the schools programs as well as suggestions for growth. Many parents participate in school activities as classroom volunteers, while some parents are teachers at the school. Fund raising and generous donations by the school community is the primary source of revenue to support school programs and the school's facility.

2. The clarification of the school's purpose and the expected school-wide learning results.

The self-study indicates a progressive development of the schools ESLRs. The educational goals of the school, at its founding, have been adapted as learning results for its students. The process has involved discussions with and among teachers, administrators, parents and students to collectively decide what knowledge and skills the graduating students from The Aptos Academy should possess. The school is engaged in an ongoing effort to incorporate state educational standards into their school programs to assure students achieve the schools ESLRs and also successfully transition to higher education of their choice.

3. The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the criteria and the expected school-wide learning results.

Information in the self study provides examples of how the school community is making progress towards gathering and analyzing data about student achievement. Although more work needs to be done, teacher's are reviewing their curriculum and materials to ascertain alignment with state standards and are using supplemental materials as needed to align curriculum with state mandated standards.

4. The development of the school-wide action plan that integrates subject area/program and support plans to address identified growth needs.

The visiting team believes the school has done an honest reflective job of evaluating its programs in respect to the school wide goals, the ESLRs, the state standards and the WASC criteria. The school community is committed and dedicated to improving the educational opportunities and success of its students and will work toward aligning core curriculum to State Standards.

5. **The development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plan.**

The school has developed an action plan based on identified areas of need. The action plan identifies the areas of need, action steps to be taken, who's responsible, timelines, resources and reporting to the community.

Chapter IV: Quality of the School's Program

Part A: Analysis of what currently exists and its impact on student learning.

CATEGORY A. ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT LEARNING

What currently exists

A1 School purpose criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

has the school established a clear statement of purpose that reflect the beliefs and philosophy of the institution?

Yes, the school has published a clear purpose statement that is outlined in the Philosophy of The Aptos Academy. The school's original purpose of "providing an educational environment where students are excited about learning and can discover and meet their full potential while studying at their own rate with a curriculum enriched by the arts remains the foundation for ongoing development of the school.

The school's philosophy and purpose are broadly disseminated through the school brochure, are included on the website, and are part of the parent information packet given to each family at the beginning of the year.

There is a deep buy in to the goals, philosophy and purpose that is evident throughout the campus. Students, staff, parents and Board members exemplify this through demonstrated mutual respect, trust and collaborative interactions whether in the classroom, on the soccer field or in the riding arena.

is the purpose defined further by adopted expected school-wide learning results that form the basis of the educational program for every student?

In the spring of 2006, the staff began the process of developing ESLRs. The school's eight ESLRs were developed through a process of first determining the educational goals each teacher holds for his or her students. These goals were found to be similar among all

teachers and were generally accepted by all staff. They were further refined through surveys of staff and dialogue between the Board and staff with a final review by parents. These eight goals were then adopted by the Board in February, 2007.

The Goals have been printed on fliers and distributed throughout the school with the title School-wide Goals. The Visiting Committee recognizes that these serve as the school's ESLRs, however the school community including parents, students, staff and Board members should identify them as such and should have a better understanding of the WASC definition of ESLRs.

While the ESLRS/School-wide Goals are posted in every classroom, students have not been made aware of them as part of their overall learning plans.

A2. Governance Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the governing authority adopt policies which are consistent with the school purpose and support the achievement of the expected school-wide learning results for the school?

The school was incorporated in 1994 as a 501(c) 3 non-profit elementary and middle school under the name Scholastic Legacy, Inc. doing business as The Aptos Academy. The founding members of the Board, Rob Fish, Shea Pase, Roger Pase, Kath Soucie and Cynthia Killian remain active on the board and have had ongoing input in defining the philosophy from its inception. Any policies and guidelines generated by this Board are developed to further the vision.

The make up of the Board supports the mission and philosophy of the school. The Board is made up of three parents, three local community business persons, one finance expert, an art professional and one faculty member.

The Board has clearly defined responsibilities that direct much of the ongoing development of the school. It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure the viability of the school. Specific duties include budget review, faculty, administration and parent concerns, student census, scholarship approval, enhanced community relations, approval of new programs, review of new programs, monitoring of contracts/leases, school promotion needs, fund raising and grant development. The Board has responsibility for setting long and short term goals which promote the school's purpose and enhance student learning.

The Board is planning to add a member that will bring skills in finance and/or non-profit law. In the fall of 2006, the Board reviewed and discussed the school's goals and agreed that they were a faithful representation of its vision for the school and for each of its students.

does the governing authority delegate implementation of these policies to the professional staff?

The Board delegates full implementation of school policies to the Principal to act as its agent at the school. She has responsibility for preparing and overseeing the yearly budget; gives the Board an assessment of the year including a summary of fundraising, community events, promotion programs, enrollment figures, trends and staffing requirements.

Principal, Shea Pase, is a driving force behind implementation of all policies and has a significant, positive impact on the school's climate which demonstrates a healthy respect for the individuality and creativity of students and staff.

does the governing authority monitor results?

The Board monitors results through the principal's annual report and through direct observation.

Several Board members are active in groups and committees at the school and are therefore on site to witness issues as they arise. Suggestions for adjustments in plans and progress leading to innovations in teaching strategies can be made with suggestions from the Board members and input from school leadership.

The Board receives formal reports from the principal and leadership staff on school progress, events and activities at the semi-annual meetings.

A3. School Leadership Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the school leadership make decisions to facilitate actions that focus the energies of the school on student achievement of the expected school-wide learning results?

The school leadership is defined as the principal, vice-principal, deans and administrator. These individuals constitute the school's Academic Council. The focus of the Council is to facilitate actions that contribute to student's achievement of the ESLRs. Staff meetings, curriculum changes, school events and community service activities are designed to promote student success both academically and socially.

does the school leadership empower the staff?

Each teacher is responsible for the academic success and social growth of the students in their care. Leadership supports teachers by ensuring they have all the classroom support, supplies, tools and curriculum materials needed.

Teachers are fully informed by the principal of any correspondence between parents and administration, whether positive or a criticism. As a small school, communication between the staff, principal and administrator is easily accomplished and is done on an informal basis when needed.

Aptos Academy has a very talented and enthusiastic staff. Teachers bring music and art into almost every classroom. They are encouraged to bring in and incorporate their ideas into the class. The survey demonstrates there is support for creativity and thus innovation is high.

Curriculum and policy suggestions are taken seriously and have led to beneficial changes throughout the years. As an example, the inclusion of Pre-K was brought forward by the 1st grade teacher.

Faculty are encouraged to share hobbies and interests with students which has resulted in the development of clubs and electives i.e. Horse Club, Chess Club, Pottery, Archery and Photography.

Continuing education for staff is encouraged through the County Office of Education and others.

does the school leadership encourage commitment, participation and shared accountability for student learning?

The small school environment with one teacher per grade level makes it necessary for everyone to work closely to accomplish the goals. All faculty, including administration wear

multiple “hats” throughout the school. Informal communication about student progress and behavior happens often.

Biweekly meetings provide a forum for staff member input about curriculum and policy changes.

Trimester Report cards that go home to the families are collaboratively prepared.

A4. Staff Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

are the school leadership and staff qualified for their assigned responsibilities?

There are no state requirements for private schools to employ teachers with teaching credentials. The school identifies criteria important to fulfilling the school’s mission. It requires passion and commitment, patience, a sense of humor, a desire to help each student reach his/her full potential and personal best and acquire a love of learning.

Four teachers have Associate Degrees; ten with Bachelor Degrees; five with Masters Degrees; six credentialed with three more to complete soon.

Teachers instructing enrichment classes outside of the core academics have extensive experience and are skilled in the areas they teach.

Some of the school’s most successful teachers started at the school as assistants, learning the culture and curriculum and moving into teaching with the support of mentors. Others, whose teaching style and philosophy were a natural fit were able to begin teaching without the support of mentor assistance.

are the school leadership and staff committed to the school’s purpose?

All staff are engaged in making the school purpose a reality. All staff and Board members were involved in the development of the ESLRs/school-wide goals that support the school’s purpose.

The school has developed a Teacher Self Evaluation based on the California Teaching Standards with additional criteria that applies directly to the school’s emphasis on individualized programs and the need for students to demonstrate mastery of a subject before moving on. The evaluation indicated that teachers request for additional training aligned with the school’s purpose i.e. special needs students, strategies for working with dyslexic and ESL students. The evaluation validates that teachers believe they are being effective in their classrooms.

Teachers support the purpose of the school through commitment to school events and activities that promote positive self-esteem, ethical behaviors . collaboration, organization and application of knowledge and skills.

does the school leadership and staff engage in ongoing professional development that promotes student learning?

Teachers choose professional development opportunities based in individual needs and interests.

For the past two years The Master Teacher Publication is used by all teachers. This is a weekly brochure of best practices for improving classroom management, student motivation and parent conferencing.

Teachers who attend seminars, workshops or conferences are expected to demonstrate learned strategies to the entire teaching staff. Asilomar Reading Conference, Science for Elementary Teachers, and See it Right, and Handwriting Without Tears have been attended by teachers.

Mentoring is common practice and is implemented when requested by a new teacher or when observations by parents or students indicate that improvement is needed.

A5. School Environment Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the school have a safe, healthy, nurturing environment that reflects the school's purpose?

The school has many policies in place that help to create a safe, healthy, nurturing environment. Students are held accountable for knowing and understanding “Classroom Rules” and “School Rules”. “Creating a Safe Environment and the “Dress Code” also help.

Each classroom has a rewards system in place that rewards ethical behavior, demonstrating “personal best” effort and getting along with other students, acts of kindness, generosity, community service or outstanding achievement. Students help with clean-up chores.

is the school environment characterized by a respect for differences, trust, caring, professionalism, support, and high expectations for each student?

The school environment is one in which individual differences are accepted and embraced. A full range of opportunities allows all students to find an avenue for success and a sense of accomplishment.

The physical environment is wheelchair accessible with an elevator, wheel chair accessible lunch table and all hallways and doors allowing full access. The facility has been used by the local Special Olympics organization.

School-wide projects provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively, to trust each other and work with students and families from other grade levels.

A6. Reporting Student Progress Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the school leadership and staff regularly assess student progress toward accomplishing the school's expected school-wide learning results?

Students are tested regularly and assessed in a variety of ways throughout the year. Classroom teachers test in math, spelling, and science with more hands on, authentic assessments being done in art, music and drama. Completions indicate a child is ready to progress to the next unit or level. Remediation is available and aimed to ensure comprehension and progress.

Formal progress reports are sent home at least each trimester, however parents have access to daily informal reports from interaction with teachers and classroom observations. Each student has a Progress chart which is updated by the teacher and serves as another snapshot for parent and student to evaluate ongoing progress.

Students in grade 3 through 8 are tested using the California Achievement Test 5, Full Battery.

does the school leadership and staff report student progress to the rest of the school community?

Trimester reports are given to students and parents. The CAT 5 overall score for each class is disseminated to the general school community through a letter sent to each parent. Every classroom maintains "Completion Charts" that track the number of "Completions" a student has received. These charts remain posted for the year in order to be an ongoing report of students progress.

A7. School Improvement Process Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the school leadership facilitate school improvement which is driven by plans of action that will enhance quality learning for all students?

As the student population began to grow from 1994, the Board determined that a campus was needed to better serve its students. In 1999 the new school campus was opened. The facilities and grounds have been well maintained and improved with each year including restructured rooms, new carpet or tile, shaded areas and walkways, a garden, horse area, archery targets and more.

The school leadership is very responsive to staff requests for updated materials and need for curriculum changes. Teachers report that responses to their requests are almost never turned down and very quickly filled. The process is generally informal with teachers either making requests in person or via quick notes left for the principal. In the case of major purchase requests, teachers will dialogue together, review a variety of publications and take suggestions to the Academic Council. This process is effective in the small family-like environment of this school.

does the school leadership have school community support and involvement?

The current action plan included input from all parts of the school community. Parents and the Board were consulted prior to approval.

does the school leadership effectively guide the work of the school?

The school's leadership has been constant from the beginning with the majority of the founding Board members still in place and four of the original five teachers still on staff. The school leadership is respected by the parents and Board members for its guidance in growth and in defining the school-wide goals and ESLRs.

The school's principal and administrative team are accessible to students and to staff. There is an atmosphere of camaraderie and trust among all team members. It is noted that the principal spends significant time in the classrooms; has a good understanding of the classroom activities; has developed relationships with students that promote open communication about their concerns and successes; has recruited and hired staff that support the school's philosophy and ESLRs; maintains an open door policy that allows for administration, Academic Counsel, and faculty to hold impromptu conferences as needed to effectively make changes and adjustments to improve the learning environment.

does the school leadership provide for accountability through monitoring of the school-wide action plan?

The action plan will be implemented by the Academic Council with the help of students, staff and parents. Volunteers have stepped forward with time and resources to make the plan a reality. It will be monitored by the Board and the parent Association to ensure that funding is in place and that the plan is implemented in a viable fashion to ensure the quality of education is enhanced for all students.

Areas of Strength for Organization for Student Learning Category (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

- 1) Maintaining informal conferences as a means to effect change quickly when necessary.
- 2) The school has a strong, long standing philosophy statement that is supported by the entire school community.
- 3) Faculty brings their many talents and passions into the classrooms to enhance the learning experience for all students.
- 4) Stable leadership both on campus and on the Board of Directors.
- 5) Respect, trust and open communication among and between staff, leadership, parents and the Board. Decisions affecting the school community are made through a collaborative model.
- 6) School leadership enjoys the support and confidence of the Board.
- 7) Teachers have the ability and are encouraged to revise curriculum for individual students based on needs and interest.
- 8) A strong philosophy that drives the ongoing development of the school; provides a basis for recruitment of students and staff; and gives students a strong education embedded with high academic standards and high ethical standards; promotes and celebrates the creativity of staff

Key Issues for Organization for Student Learning (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

- 1) There is a need for more training for staff with emphasis on students with learning disabilities and second language learners.
- 2) There is a need to institute a professional development plan that promotes more teachers attending conferences and seminars that support the ESLRs.
- 3) If the School-wide Goals, as developed by the stakeholder, are to be considered as the Expected School-wide Learning Results, there is a need for them to be identified as such

in publications. Students need to understand the ESLRs and the role they play in their educational plan. The ESLRs must be measurable.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

- 1) Interviews with Academic Counsel, teachers and student council
- 2) The Aptos Academy brochure
- 3) List of conferences attended by staff
- 4) Completion Charts
- 5) Aptos Academy Chronicle
- 6) School-wide Goals Chart
- 7) The Completion Flier

CATEGORY B. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

What currently exists

B1. What Students Learn Criterion

Guide Question: To what extent...

does the school provide a challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school's purpose and results in student achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results through successful completion of any course of study offered?

Yes, the school follows California State Standards as a basis with the use of standards aligned textbooks in most classrooms. Art, music and drama enrich the standards based curriculum and offers students opportunities for pursuing individual interests. Conversational Spanish begins as a required course in grades 2 through 8.

Art is taught in all grades and is integrated across the curriculum.

Drama begins in Pre-K and continues through 8th grade with students participating in performances throughout the year.

Music is also part of the core curriculum and begins as movement, simple rhythm, and songs for Pre-K and continues through 5th grade.

Additional electives that support application of knowledge and skills are available for 6th through 8th grade students

Students are allowed to progress at their own pace. No student works beyond his or her understanding and for those students who have mastered concepts being presented in class there are opportunities to advance. All staff is available to assist students who need to work outside of the classroom. Students may seek out the principal, teacher assistants, or any other onsite staff for help when needed. The Homework Club is an after school program open to students three days a week.

B2. How Students Learn Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

does the professional staff use research-based knowledge about teaching and learning?

The teachers employ techniques and skills gained from their education, life experience and continuing professional development in seminars, workshops, conferences, independent study, internet research and networking with other teachers to engage every student in learning at her or his own pace. Some of the teachers are pursuing advanced degrees including a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Teachers have attended conferences and seminars. The Asilomar Reading conference was attended by four teachers. The Aspergers Syndrome Conference was attended by the 6th and 7th / 8th grade teachers. Other teachers selected the following professional development opportunities: Simply Sensational Science, RICA trainings, Citizen Leader. Brain Gym, provided techniques for preparing students to understand the role nutrition plays in the ability of the brain to focus and learn.

The professional staff brings a rich variety of experience from outside of education that enhance the vision and direction of the school.

does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students at a high level of learning consistent with the school's purpose and expected school-wide learning results?

The curriculum incorporates standards based textbooks, and workbooks in core subject areas, however, it is observed that the teachers go beyond the textbooks in creating collaborative activities to engage and involve all students and to enhance student learning.

Parent and faculty observations, and interviews with students reveal that hands on lessons are frequently developed by teachers to ensure that students internalize the lessons being taught.

Field trips, class presentations by outside speakers, assembly programs, and community projects are all a part of the learning experience at Aptos Academy.

School-wide projects/events such as the Harvest Carnival, Science Fair, Art Show, and Author's Fair allow students to apply their knowledge and skills and to showcase it to the greater community.

Student Council and Student Store activities are additional opportunities for promoting application of problem solving, critical thinking and organization. Students from grades 3 through 8 have representation on the Student Council and have been given leadership responsibilities that include planning events and presenting the Principal with proposals for improving the school's learning environment.

Learning that goes beyond the classroom is encouraged and embraced by the school community and is evidenced by the number of field trips and enrichment opportunities.

B3. How Assessment Is Used Criterion

Guide Questions: To what extent...

is teacher and student use of assessment frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process?

Ongoing and varied assessments take place on a daily basis throughout the school. Methods of assessment include timed standard tests at the end of a chapter or section of study, oral, written, portfolios, and hands on activities that give a clear picture of student ability. As students work at their own pace, teachers actively engage them through interview and dialogue.

Students in grades 2 through 8 are given a class evaluation to rate the degree to which they believe their understanding of subject areas has increased. It also evaluates which subjects they found most interesting, challenging and which electives they enjoyed the most. Students are also asked to share this information with peers and other staff members at the monthly awards assembly.

Writing contests, class projects, science experiments, and activities such as "Iron Chef" all give additional ways to creatively assess students' ability.

The school has implemented an assessment process known as "A Completion" which is used in every classroom. This assessment provides consistency throughout grade levels. Students

receive “a completion” only when a section of text or unit of study is completed and they can demonstrate that it is their personal best and that they have an understanding of the concepts.

Teacher use a variety of ways to determine when “A Completion” is awarded. Students are rewarded after 6 Completions are placed on the Completion Charts that appear in each classroom.

are the assessment results the basis for measurement of each student’s progress toward the expected school-wide learning results?

Students are assessed in all areas of the curriculum including enrichment classes. For the teacher every report, presentation, project, and test is an opportunity to evaluate a student’s progress toward achievement of the ESLRs/school-wide goals. Each student is evaluated based on personal best as well as grade level requirements and standards.

are the assessment results the basis for regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction?

The school does regular evaluation of the curriculum through reviewing student proficiency, surveying students, teachers and parents for their input. CAT5 scores are also used in determining areas of need in the curriculum.

Teachers have the option to petition the Academic Council for texts and materials to make improvements. Staff discussion and collaborative review is done. A variety of texts are considered and after final review with the core teacher an order will be placed. Teachers report that the Council has been responsive.

At monthly assemblies students receive awards for academic and social accomplishments. Students are also given the opportunity to voluntarily speak about what they have learned during the month. “Leaf” awards are given to students who demonstrate ethical, charitable, or kind behaviors.

Teachers are encouraged to develop assessments that are appropriate for the projects and learning activities unique to each classroom.

are the assessment results the basis for the allocation of resources?

Whenever assessment results reveal a weakness in the curriculum, a need to augment an area of student study or a class is shown to need additional teacher support, the principal has the authority to reallocate resources.

Review of CAT results indicated that more attention was needed in the area of grammar at all grade levels. A review of various workbooks and texts led to the adoption of Rules of the Game for 6th and 7th grade and Dictionary Skills for 2nd through 6th.

Areas of Strength for Curriculum and Instruction Category (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

- 1) The Completion Process gives students, parents and staff ongoing, clear information about students' progress. It is commendable that students must demonstrate work that is their personal best to receive a completion.
- 2) Teacher knowledge and use of the California State Standards
- 3) Teachers have access to the Academic Council to request curriculum materials
- 4) The professional staff is encouraged to attend conferences and seminars to enrich the learning environment.
- 5) Students self report their academic goals and their successes which helps to build student confidence and ability to direct their own learning.
- 6) Teachers are given the freedom to create and use many assessments in addition to traditional end of chapter and standardized tests.
- 7) All students have access to a rich curriculum that supports the core subjects with and through the arts.
- 8) The many school activities/events support and enrich the curriculum.

Key Issues for Curriculum and Instruction (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

- 1) There is a need to develop a school-wide, systematic assessment strategy that will be kept by the core teacher to demonstrate student progress from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.
- 2) It has been acknowledged by parents and staff that students are lacking strong organizational skills and study habits. There is a need to implement a program to support students in these areas.
- 3) Parent evaluations indicate a desire for more hands on science at all levels.
- 4) The majority of textbooks and workbooks are up to 10 years old. There is a need to update with current publications that are aligned to the State Standards.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

- 1) Completion Charts
- 2) California State Standards in the classrooms and in the principal's office.

- 3) Interviews with teachers, student council, parents, Academic Counsel.
- 4) Alumni Data
- 5) Teacher Development Fund
- 6) Textbook List

C. SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

What currently exists

C1. Student Connectedness Criterion

Guide Question: To what extent...

are students connected to a system of support services, activities and opportunities at the school and within the community that meet the challenges of the curricular/co-curricular program in order to achieve the expected school-wide learning results?

All students at the Aptos Academy receive individual attention. If the staff concurs that a particular student needs additional educational or behavioral support and assistance, a process begins to insure that the student is given that attention. Staff and administration are always available and accessible to each student. Academically, the students are supported in their individualized education program by the staff and administration. As needed, separate upper and lower school staff meetings are held to meet the needs of students who require additional support. The computer lab is available to students who need remedial help.

Over 94% of the students surveyed felt they were working at their personal best. Over 90% felt they were achieving and being helped to achieve their goals. The school has a separate group of teachers for enrichment classes. This allows core teachers time to review and assess student work and to offer immediate assistance to any student perceived to be in need.

The Homework Club and the After School program provides support for students who are in need of academic help and provides supervised space for those who are doing their homework. For those students who are picked up late, snacks are provided.

If a student requires more support and assistance than the school can provide, parents are consulted and given names of therapists and experts who can provide full assessments.

Behavioral issues are dealt with in a variety of ways to bring about positive changes. If these strategies fail, parent conferences are mandated and recommendations are made. The school policy "Creating a Safe Environment" delineates the levels of intervention and consequences.

Staff and administration is available before, during and after school to parents and students. Written notices, the monthly school calendar, weekly newsletters, and e-mail are sent to parents on a regular basis. Parent Orientation Night provides parents and the community with topics relevant to their

children's success at school.

Each month there are scheduled events and activities that involve both teachers and students, outside of class time. These events, shows, plays and community service activities are part of the culture of the school and reinforce student achievement in all areas. There is a student council, student store, newspaper, and yearbook. These activities help to make for a cheerful, active environment, where learning is fun and meaningful for all participants.

C2. Parent/Community Involvement Criterion

Guide Question: To what extent...

does the school leadership employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that parental and community involvement is integral to the school's established support system for students?

The school has always sought to be involved with and actively participate in the Santa Cruz educational community and the community in general. At the civic level, Aptos Academy students have participated in events such as the Capitola Mall Young Author's Book Fair, Children's Day in Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee, Santa Cruz health Fair, Santa Cruz Bike to School Day, KSBW Share the Holidays, Jacob's Heart Magic from the Heart Show, Santa Cruz Fair, Monte Foundation Fireworks, and the Santa Cruz Independent School Fair. The School is a member of the Aptos Chamber of Commerce and participates each year in the Aptos 4th of July Parade with a float created and manned by summer school students, parents, and staff.

The students participate in a minimum of five field trips per year designed to add to the academic curriculum and to make current lesson plans relevant. (The younger students visit various businesses in the community, i.e. pizza parlor, dentist's office, pet store and libraries. Middle school students have had year-end trips to Washington, D.C., Catalina and this year will go to Hawaii. The sixth grade students attend science camp for a week in the spring.)

Outside speakers, i.e. The Fire Department, Second Harvest Food, Earth Capades, From Farm to Market all come in to do school assemblies and to enhance the curriculum. Parents also share their careers or special interests with the students.

Aptos Academy has a long history of making the campus available to artists and community groups. (A classical Japanese Dance group, the Shoreline Band, a traveling Shakespeare group, the world hackie sack footballers, the local Soccer League, the Boys Scouts and the local Toastmasters are some of the groups who have brought events to the campus.) Parents and staff work collaboratively to put on events to fund the many school activities and classroom needs. Parents are always welcome to observe and encouraged to assist in the classrooms. Parents are also given three progress reports/report cards a year and have private scheduled conferences with the core teacher and the elective teachers. Room parents make sure that all pertinent information is sent to parents via e-mail and that the information is on the school's website.

Areas of Strength for Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth Category

1. Collaboration of IEP's between faculty, administration, and parents.
2. Use of computer room to remediate student work.
3. Availability of a faculty or administration to remediate student work.
4. Homework Club
5. School policy "Creating a Safe Environment"
6. The students' experience of an average of five field trips per year.
7. The school has a long history of making the campus available for other outside artists to utilize.
8. Aptos Academy's involvement in the community has given the school a good "word of mouth" reputation.
9. Parent classroom observations
10. Use of non-core teachers for enrichment classes
11. Dissemination of information to Parent body via e-mail, newsletters and website.
12. All staff members are Red Cross certified.

Key Issues for Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth Category (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

1. Consistently keeping all students' Individual Learning Plans current and fully documented.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Student class evaluation	Staff meeting minutes
"Creating a Safe Environment Policy"	Principal notes to staff
Parent Class Observations	Homework Club Schedule
Conflict resolution handout	Student Council Minutes
Recognition & Award plaques	Newsletters
Parent Interest & Resource Survey	Field trip lists & attendance
Web site	Calendar of community use

D. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

What currently exists

D1. Resources Criterion

Guide Question: To what extent...

are the resources available to the school sufficient to sustain the school program and effectively used to carry out the school's purpose and student achievement of the expected school-wide learning results?

The school owns the facility, built specifically for the school through the generosity of members of the community and school patrons. The County of Santa Cruz assessed value of the school and property for the 2006-2007 year at \$2,639,635. The school's mortgage balance is \$983,499 and is due to be refinanced in 2009.

The entire school's budget is devoted to the operation and maintenance of the school while providing a limited number of full and partial scholarships. The school is funded completely through tuition, fundraising and donations. The budget for the 2006-2007 school year was set at \$782,000. Of this, 71% is for staff salary and benefits, 16% is for mortgage, 3% for insurance and worker's compensation, 2% is designated for student supplies, materials and texts, and 8% is for utilities, security, maintenance, advertising and miscellaneous expenses.

Tuition and registrations fees do not cover the total costs of operation. The remaining balance is met through fundraisers and cash donations from school supporters.

There are two signatories for main accounts and mortgage account: the President/Principal and Chairman of the Board. The school also has credit cards that are held by the Principal and Vice-Principal. The Principal maintains the accounts, pays the bills and credit card charges. Taxes are prepared by Evans & Evans, an accounting firm in Carmel Valley. Payroll is handled by Intuit Payroll Services on a monthly schedule. The school's insurance is provided through Farmers Insurance. The current health insurance provider is Pacificare.

The school's facility manager works on a part-time and on-call schedule and is able to take care of the school's maintenance, and carpentry needs. Students assist in helping to maintain a safe and sanitary environment conducive to student learning.

Textbooks are replaced as needed and have remained in good shape due to the school policy of having students care for their books. Parents are a major source of supplies and equipment. Parent surveys and faculty input determine priorities for school acquisitions. As a result, a room has been dedicated to the science program. The next project will be to acquire a portable to house foreign language and a general resource library.

D2. Resource Planning Criterion

Guide Question: To what extent...

do the governing authority and the school execute responsible resource planning for the future?

A master resource plan guided the successful acquisition of property, and the financial procurement for the design, construction and the outfitting the new school facility. The Board uses the annual budgets and school year reviews as its basis for future planning. Present goals include refinancing the building in 2009 and marketing plans to increase enrollment. The school was designed to require only general maintenance and minimal gardening. Other general maintenance and upgrades have been done in house and with minimal budget impact. This has been accomplished through donated materials, parent contribution of time and labor and volunteer help.

A yearly Auction helps to balance the budget and helps to fund the arts and science programs and the school's scholarship program. Other fundraiser proceeds are used for classroom activities and special materials. Marketing plans are getting a good response and plans are being made to reach a larger portion of the Watsonville area.

Areas of Strength for Resource Management and Development Category (if any) that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students

1. The school owns its own campus and it is well maintained.
2. The students help maintain their school through daily cleaning assignments and school materials are well cared for.
3. 71% of the operating budget goes to faculty salary and benefits.
4. 12% of the budget comes from fundraising.
5. Aptos Academy has been successful at fundraising.
6. In house campus maintenance, repair and upgrade through the efforts of Antonio Silva, the facilities manager, and parents and volunteers.
7. Enrollment is increasing.
8. Successful yearly student class fundraisers.

Key Issues for Resource Management and Development Category

1. Extend marketing efforts to include more to the south county.
2. The school has room for 144 students and has not yet met that target.

Important evidence about student learning from the self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:

Student Admission data	School Budget reports to the Board
Banking records	Tax records & statements
Insurance bills & payments	County Property Assessment
Healthcare policy & payments	Parent long-range plan surveys
Textbook lists per classroom	Board Meeting minutes
Faculty meeting minutes	List of items built in house
List of items donated to school	

Part B: School-wide strengths and critical areas for follow-up.

General Comments:

Aptos Academy is to be commended for its dedication in providing an exceptional program for its students. The Staff and Administration were thorough and helpful in clarifying all the information presented in its document and evidence presented in the classrooms. The students are active and motivated in achieving at their personal best. They are supportive of each other and enthused about their school.

The staff and students know that their input is valued and implemented as appropriate.

Strengths

The school provides a safe nurturing environment for all students. Each child is encouraged to work at his/her own personal best. Positive reinforcement is used consistently, in the form of completion charts, so that individual students are recognized in a non-intrusive manner, for their academic achievement. The school provides a rich curriculum of electives, in addition to the core curriculum to challenge each child's personal academic preferences and strengths. The electives include Spanish, drama, ceramics, painting, gardening, cooking, animal care (horses).

There is a genuine commitment by the staff, parents and administration to provide a meaningful learning environment that will enhance and support learning for the students at Aptos Academy. Teachers bring with them a varied and rich background of experiences and expertise. Communication among the staff and administration is on a daily and personal basis. Community involvement has been and continues to be a huge and successful undertaking.

The school-wide goals were developed from the schools mission statement and will serve as a clarification of the school's ESLRs.

Areas for follow-up

Alignment of curriculum with state standards, providing funding to secure state aligned textbooks and support materials, and providing teacher training to implement standard based curriculum is an ongoing challenge. An increased focus on using assessment data, both from school originated and standardized tests, to improve curriculum will serve to monitor and support student progress.

The existing school-wide goals must be edited and refined to focus on expected student learning results that are measurable and can be used to assess student progress.

School-wide Areas of Strength

1. A commitment by the staff, parents and administration to provide a meaningful learning environment
2. Teachers bring with them a varied and rich background of experiences and expertise. They share these experiences through activities in the classroom and through enrichment classes.
3. Teachers supplement the curriculum with activities that are embedded with State Standards.
4. Communication among the staff and administration is on a daily basis.
5. Community involvement and support has been and continues to be a huge and successful undertaking.

School wide critical areas for follow-up

1. Align all core classes with the California State Standards
2. Continue staff development to facilitate implementation of standards based curriculum.
3. Continue to provide resources to secure standards based curriculum and textbooks as needed.
4. Implement a computerized system of assessment data to track progress and student achievement.
5. Update ESLRs to reflect measurable student outcomes separate from school-wide goals.

Chapter V: Ongoing School Improvement

Summary of the school-wide action plan

The school's action plan consists of three major components: Community involvement and outreach, facilities improvement and expansion, and curriculum and staff development.

The community involvement component is expressed in Action Plan items 1,5,7 and 8.

The stated goals of this component include promotion of the school to the wider community through service activities, improvement of connectedness to the wider community and to increase enrollment in conjunction with creating a more diverse student body. An effort is being made to improve Board support of faculty and school development.

The facilities improvement component is outlined in Action Plan item 2 and 3. The stated goals include adding classroom space, upgrading kitchen and laundry facilities, enhancing science classrooms and equipment, providing lockers for middle school students and expanding the library and computer lab. Long- term plans also include improving physical education opportunities for students by adding a track around the edge of the sports field.

The curriculum and staff development component is outlined in Action Plan items 1,3,4 and 6. The school plans include expansion of the art, PE, science and foreign language curriculum. Four tasks in Action Plan item 6 specifically address acquiring funds for teacher training, enhancing staff awareness of and access to continuing education workshops and conferences, providing substitute teacher coverage, and arranging on campus collaboration time for teachers and staff. Teachers use the Master Teacher professional development program to stay updated on current best practices in teaching.

Comments on school improvement issues:

a) Adequacy of action plan in addressing the critical areas for follow-up

The action plan states critical areas for follow-up, steps that need to be taken, persons responsible, timelines, resources, ways to access that the step has been taken, and a means to report to stakeholders what actions have been taken on the steps listed. The school's action plan will need to be modified to include the critical areas identified by the Visiting Committee. The school's strong commitment to enhancing student learning will drive their effort to facilitate suggested modifications.

b) Enhancement of student learning

Student learning will be enhanced if the action plan is modified to include steps to align curriculum to state standards and provide staff development specifically designed to train

teachers to modify curriculum to meet standards as well as the use of assessment data to track student progress.

The development of measurable ESLRs that are comprehensible to students and will guide students in tracking their own learning results will enhance student success.

c) Integration of all major school initiatives into action plan

The action plan is clearly stated, includes major school initiatives and provides for closure on projects now underway and those planned in the future. The action plan will be modified to include steps to incorporate State Standards into the curriculum and methods to measure student achievement of those standards. Providing staff development to implement teaching of standardized curriculum is also recommended. The school will revise their ESLRs to provide measurability.

d) Feasibility of the action plan within existing resources

The action plan appears feasible within existing resources and will be modified according to items mentioned in part c) above.

e) Degree of commitment to the action plan - school wide and system wide

The staff at Aptos Academy is highly committed to accomplishing the action plan as evidenced by the production of a detailed self-study. Student learning and success are at its central focus. All stakeholders throughout the school community were involved in the self study and remain committed to school and student success.

Existing factors that support school improvement

The most important factors to support school improvement is the strong commitment and desire by administration, staff and parents to continue the ongoing growth and development of opportunities to enhance student achievement. The high degree of parent involvement in the day to day school activities and long term support of community stakeholders is a most valuable asset to school improvement. The school also benefits greatly from a teaching staff who bring a rich background of experience and dedication to the school.

Impediments to school improvement that the school will need to overcome in order to accomplish any of the action plan sections

The greatest potential obstacle to achieving some portions of the action plan are lack of adequate staff development specific to alignment of curriculum to State Standards at each grade level and the use of a professionally acceptable assessment process to collect, disaggregate, and analyze student performance data..

The development of measurable school-wide ESLRs is in progress..

Soundness of follow-up process to monitor accomplishment of school-wide action plan

The Principal will guide the staff toward accomplishing the steps of the action plan in a timely manner. The administration and staff are committed to the improvement of the school.