

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

SITE VIST REPORT

**Alianza Charter School
Watsonville, California
May 23rd, 2005**

Site Visit Committee Members

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Introduction to the California Charter Schools Association Site Visit Process

In alignment with its mission to improve student achievement by strengthening and expanding California's public charter schools, the California Charter Schools Association and its members have taken the lead in articulating high standards for charter school operations by adopting *Quality Statements for Charter School Operations* (Attachment A). We believe that these standards will guide our ability as individuals and as a movement to live up to our bargain of "flexibility for accountability" and ensure the strength and sustainability of the charter school movement.

The *Association's Quality Site Visit Protocol* is one tool that can be used to measure a charter school's progress in meeting the standards outlined in our Quality Statements and provides for constructive feedback for program improvement.

The senior purpose of the Site Visit process is to enable school stakeholders to: 1) gain insight into the school's performance in terms of its own mission and goals, and; 2) to begin development and implementation of a systematic plan for accelerating accomplishment of its own mission and goals.

To the extent possible, the Association is working closely with other program review agencies (such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)), so that our site visits join with existing processes. The Association report, however, will address charter-specific programmatic and operational issues in order to assist the school in fully meeting our criteria.

Background of Visit for Alianza

Alianza Charter School was invited to participate in the Association's Site protocol for the following reason (s):

- Alianza has a low API score and a similar/statewide schools rank of "1", the school *could* be in danger of being closed as a charter school under the terms of AB 1137. This could result in a disruption to students and is clearly a prospect that all stakeholders wish to avoid. Given the timing and urgency of this situation, the visiting team has identified a number of areas for immediate action.
- At the same time, in an effort to gain a better understanding of dual immersion programs and be in a better position to advocate for such programs, the California Charter Schools Association formed an affinity group for dual immersion charter schools. Three schools have agreed to participate in the Quality Site Visit process and the findings will be shared and disseminated among the three schools in an effort to share best practices and improve the advocacy efforts dual immersion charter school programs in California.

The purpose of the visit was to measure the school's educational program against the Association's Quality Statements for Charter School Operations and provide suggestions for the school's continuous improvement efforts. (see Quality Statements in Attachment A).

The following evaluation of Alianza Charter School is based on the school's self-assessment, interviews with board members, parents, students and staff, and direct observations of the school during the site visit. Included is a narrative report and statement rankings based on the results of the site visit. (see Statement Ranking and Scoring Guidelines in Attachment B).

Rankings and Committee Findings

(Please refer to the Statement Ranking and Scoring Guidelines, Attachment B)

Quality Statement 1: Student Academic Achievement First	
A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards and closing achievement gaps of individual students.	
Characteristics	Score
<i>1.1- Achieves clear and measurable program goals and student learning objectives, and meets its stated performance standards</i>	3
<i>1.2- Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement</i>	3.5
<i>1.3- Provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student</i>	3.4
<i>1.4- Implements and directs learning experiences (consistent with the school's purpose and charter) that actively engage students</i>	3.5
<i>1.5- Allocates appropriate resources for instructional materials, staffing, and facilities to promote high levels of student achievement</i>	3
<i>1.6- The school environment is safe, healthy, and nurturing</i>	4
<i>1.7- Productively engages parental and community involvement as a part of the school's support system</i>	3
<i>1.8- Shares vision among the school community and demonstrates its mission in daily action and practice</i>	4
Overall Statement Ranking/Avg. Score	3.425

Narrative Observation:

Quality Characteristic 1.1: <i>Achieves clear and measurable program goals and student learning objectives, and meets its stated performance standards</i>	Rubric Score 3
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The founders and stakeholders of Alianza Charter School have outlined the following goals in its charter:

- Ensure that the program makes use of effective instructional strategies that will enable both language minority and language majority students to develop oral fluency and literacy in Spanish and English.
- Develop and implement an authentic assessment process that brings technology into portfolio assessment.
- Develop and implement a process of staff development that will ensure that teachers achieve mastery of the effective instructional strategies that will include refining the instructional approaches based on an analysis of the data derived from assessments.
- Foster the development of a learning community within which staff and parents share similar understandings of the school program's goals and operations and that both are committed to the program, parents of language majority and language minority students are involved in the decision making process and supporting its activities, and parents have access to learning resources for their own development.
- Expand the current K-6 Spanish/English dual language immersion program to a K-8 program serving every student in the school when facility space becomes available.

Based on the observations of the Quality Site Visit team and the evidence provided by the school, it is clear that Alianza Charter School is achieving the program goals and learning objectives

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stated within its charter. The team was able to find significant evidence that the school is successful in delivering the school’s Two Way Bilingual Immersion program to its current student population. Regardless of the school’s current success, in order to achieve long term sustainability, Alianza will have to develop a comprehensive strategic plan and a pro-active improvement cycle that includes strategies for continuing to meet API growth targets and other accountability measures required by PVUSD and AYP. In these efforts, it is essential that the school’s core mission and vision stay intact during this process; however given current changes in school environment, student population, and other “elements of change” the school will have to engage in considerable “re-visioning” with respect program goals and student learning objectives.

<p>Quality Characteristic 1.2: <i>Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement</i></p>	<p>Rubric Score 3.5</p>
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Alianza Charter School currently has the following high expectations for student achievement in place:

- Mastery of the California Academic content standards in Spanish and English
- High standards for achievement and behavior
- Students are expected to perform at the highest degree to which they are capable
- Students are expected to appreciate and celebrate ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism and individual differences in the school setting
- Students are to be supported and challenged to develop self-awareness and esteem as participants in a local and global community
- Students are supported and challenged to develop as well rounded and capable individuals who will make a contribution to a democratic society

Although Alianza currently demonstrates high expectations for students and student achievement goals are addressed in the school’s charter petition, increased expectations with regards to student performance on current state mandated accountability measures (STAR/CST) will need to be an essential piece of the schools current strategic planning efforts.

<p>Quality Characteristic 1.3: <i>Provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student</i></p>	<p>Rubric Score 3.4</p>
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Alianza Charter School provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student through:

- State Adopted Texts and Curriculum
- Teacher developed curriculum
- Specialized curriculum for Two Way Bilingual Immersion programs

During the Quality Site Visit’s student focus group, a native English speaking student did have some concerns regarding how challenging and coherent the curriculum was for primary English speakers. Regardless, the student felt very positive of about Alianza and the education that has been provided, the student is fully bilingual and performs at grade level in both languages. Alianza will need to continue to make efforts to ensure that all students from both Spanish and English backgrounds are challenged to the highest degree to which they are capable.

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Based on our interviews with staff and classroom observations, it is clear that Alianza implements and directs learning experiences, consistent with the school's charter, that actively engage students. There are a variety of learning experiences offered to the students of Alianza; students realize learning experiences beyond the classroom in the form of outdoor education experiences, study trips and technology-based learning experiences.

Quality Characteristic 1.5: <i>Allocates appropriate resources for instructional materials, staffing, and facilities to promote high levels of student achievement</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Based on observations made by the visiting team and the evidence provided by the school, we feel that school resources have clearly been allocated for the purposes of student achievement.

Quality Characteristic 1.6: <i>The school environment is safe, healthy, and nurturing</i>	Rubric Score 4
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The school has developed a school safety plan and has conducted parent surveys that reveal parents and students are generally satisfied with the school's environment. Additionally, the visiting team found the school environment to be safe, healthy, and nurturing.

Quality Characteristic 1.7: <i>Productively engages parental and community involvement as a part of the school's support system</i>	Rubric Score 3
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During the visit we met members of the school community and the community at-large. Several parents are actively engaged as members of the advisory board and other school-wide committees. Based on these observations, it is evident that Alianza is fairly productive in its engagement of parental and community involvement as part of the school's support system.

Quality Characteristic 1.8: <i>Shares vision among the school community and demonstrates its mission in daily action and practice</i>	Rubric Score 4
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Vision and mission is shared among the school community at-large and is demonstrated daily in action and practice. This is evidenced by the continued relationship with the Rodriguez Street Community and the continued relationship with the school district despite significant changes and trying times in recent years; including a move to a new facility.

The school will need to continue its efforts to communicate and engage the communities of native English speakers in an effort to realize the optimum circumstances for program success. Any recruitment, communication and engagement of such stakeholders should be conducted in compliance with all legal requirements.

Quality Statement 2: Ethical Leadership The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.
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Characteristics	Score
2.1- <i>Effectively communicates and engages stakeholders in the vision and mission of the school</i>	3.5
2.2- <i>Consistently puts into practice the educational program outlined in its charter</i>	4
2.3- <i>Generates and sustains a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth</i>	3.5
2.4- <i>Regularly monitors and evaluates the success of the school's program</i>	3.5
2.5- <i>Provides regular, public reports on the school's progress towards achieving its goals to the school community and to the school's authorizer</i>	3.5
2.6- <i>Makes management decisions with the goal of optimizing successful teaching and learning experiences</i>	4
2.7- <i>Treats all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect</i>	4
2.8- <i>Understands the laws that govern charter schools and maintains policies and procedures that enable the school to function within the law</i>	3
2.9- <i>Monitors trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charters operate</i>	4
2.10- <i>Abstains from any decision involving a potential or actual conflict of interest</i>	3.5
2.11- <i>Respects diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter</i>	4
Overall Statement Ranking/Avg. Score	3.68

Quality Characteristic 2.1:	Rubric Score
<i>Effectively communicates and engages stakeholders in the vision and mission of the school</i>	3.5

The principal and the leadership team share the responsibility for communicating and engaging stakeholders in the mission and vision of the school. This is evidenced by the long-standing relationship with the Rodriguez Street Community and the continued relationship with the school district despite significant changes and trying times in recent years; including a move to a new facility. The school will need to continue its efforts to communicate and engage the communities of native English speakers in order to achieve the optimum environment for bilingual program success. Any recruitment, communication and engagement of such stakeholders should be conducted in compliance with all legal requirements. Alianza should review and revise enrollment policies as needed to fully realize the vision and mission of the school.

Quality Characteristic 2.2:	Rubric Score
<i>Consistently puts into practice the educational program outlined in its charter</i>	4

It was evident in the site observations and interviews with staff and students, that the principal and the leadership team make every effort to consistently put into practice the educational program outlined in its charter. The principal and the leadership team continue to make efforts to improve the educational program and bring the program into full alignment with the program outlined in the charter.

Quality Characteristic 2.3:	Rubric Score
<i>Generates and sustains a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth</i>	3.5

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Staff and students have a strong sense of school culture and feel connected to the school community. Staff experience ample professional opportunities and are provided release time each week. During the release time staff is able to participate in curriculum planning and professional growth opportunities. Students are exposed to “Super Subs” during this time. “Super Subs” are practicing professionals that deliver curriculum to students in speciality areas such as art and music.

Quality Characteristic 2.4: <i>Regularly monitors and evaluates the success of the school's program</i>	Rubric Score 3.5
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The principal and the leadership team engage in a cycle of planning each year based on the previous year's student achievement results. This has enabled the school to meet its yearly API growth targets but the school still needs to engage a comprehensive strategic planning effort that includes continuous self-evaluation regarding the academic and operational program needs. One way the school leadership could accomplish this is through an “Association Approved” accreditation process.

Quality Characteristic 2.5: <i>Provides regular, public reports on the school's progress towards achieving its goals to the school community and to the school's authorizer</i>	Rubric Score 3.5
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Alianza Charter School complies with all state and authorizer mandated reporting requirements, including an annual report to PVUSD and School Accountability Report Card published by School Wise Press.

Quality Characteristic 2.6: <i>Makes management decisions with the goal of optimizing successful teaching and learning experiences</i>	Rubric Score 4
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The principal and leadership team consistently make management decisions with the goal of successful teaching and learning experiences. The leadership has kept the administration of the school very lean and the majority of the schools resources are focused on teachers and the students. Additionally, teachers informed the visiting team of their involvement with management decisions and the sense of shared leadership with the school's principal.

Quality Characteristic 2.7: <i>Treats all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect</i>	Rubric Score 4
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Alianza has a strong shared leadership model in which there is mutual respect and strong sense of loyalty to each other and the school community.

Quality Characteristic 2.8: <i>Understands the laws that govern charter schools and maintains policies and procedures that enable the school to function within the law</i>	Rubric Score 3
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The school principal serves on the Membership Council for the California Charter Schools Association and maintains a cogent understanding of the laws that govern charter schools. The principal is also aware of trends, issues and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate. During the strategic planning process, the visiting team encourages the principal to continue to use this knowledge in utilizing and maximizing the school's flexibility under charter law.

Quality Characteristic 2.9: <i>Monitors trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charters operate</i>	Rubric Score 4
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The Principal is a member of the Members Council for the California Charter Schools

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Association and several staff members attend the annual charter schools conference. Through these venues, Alianza maintains a good understanding of the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate.

Quality Characteristic 2.10: <i>Abstains from any decision involving a potential or actual conflict of interest</i>	Rubric Score 3.5
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The visiting team did not observe any decision making regarding conflicts of interest, however the school leadership did indicate that any conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest in relation to the fiscal policies and operations of the charter school are always declared by school leaders and stakeholders are aware of any such conflicts of interest.

Quality Characteristic 2.11: <i>Respects diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter</i>	Rubric Score 4
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Based on observations by the visiting team and evidence provided by the school, it is clear that Alianza's leadership has a good understanding and respect for racial, cultural and linguistic diversity among students and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners.

Quality Statement 3: Continuous Focus on Increasing Quality The charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.
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Characteristics	Score
<i>3.1- Uses information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies for self-examination and improvement</i>	3
<i>3.2- Establishes both long and short term goals and plans for accomplishing the school's mission as stated in its charter</i>	3
<i>3.3- Uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction</i>	3.5
<i>3.4- Involves staff, students, parents and other stakeholders in its accountability for student learning and in the school's program evaluation process</i>	3
Overall Statement Ranking/Avg. Score	3.125

Quality Characteristic 3.1:	Rubric Score
<i>Uses information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies for self-examination and improvement</i>	3

The staff has worked diligently to develop an internal assessment process known as the "Alianza Data Base System." This system consists of a collection of data points relevant to student achievement and provides a framework for teachers to collect this data. Currently the staff utilizes the Alianza Database System for its primary information source and database collection. At the beginning of each year they review the previous years scores to develop strategies for improvement. These tools and this strategy has enabled Alianza to continue to meet its annual API growth targets. The school's data base currently focuses on the students language development for both English and Spanish, which is aligned with the goals and learning objectives for Alianza students. Although the current data base is a good tool, it will need to be continuously refined and used more consistently by staff in order to aid the school in meeting performance standards and API growth targets.

Quality Characteristic 3.2:	Rubric Score
<i>Establishes both long and short term goals and plans for accomplishing the school's mission as stated in its charter</i>	3

Alianza has established benchmarks for student achievement and uses a number of accountability tools to measure these benchmarks. These benchmarks and tools include teacher developed rubrics, standardized tests, and state approved curriculum texts. Some of these tools and benchmarks, such as the SABE, should be revised and/or removed from the educational program if they are not aligned to the current curriculum and student performance standards.

Alianza has had a good track record of responding to and reaching short term goals. The school's founders and the current staff have set some long term goals and have some general plans in place for attaining those goals. The staff will need to continue flush out long term goals and create a comprehensive strategic plan for both academic and operational aspects of the school.

Quality Characteristic 3.3:	Rubric Score
<i>Uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction</i>	3.5

Each fall Alianza uses student assessment results from the STAR/CST to inform decision making with regards to curriculum and instruction. The staff also uses the student information regarding

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assessments and benchmarks, found within the Alianza Data Base System, to adjust the curriculum throughout the year.

Although the staff uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction, the use of the data in the Alianza Data Base is not consistent from teacher to teacher and student to student. Additionally, the data is not aggregated in a way that is reliable or sufficient for informing decisions regarding curriculum and instruction.

Quality Characteristic 3.4: <i>Involves staff, students, parents and other stakeholders in its accountability for student learning and in the school's program evaluation process</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Staff, students, parents, Board members, and external stakeholders (including the California Charter Schools Association) have been pro-actively involved in Alianza's program evaluation and accountability efforts. Based on observations and interviews conducted by the visiting team, stakeholders seem to be mostly satisfied. The team encourages Alianza to continue to conduct surveys regarding stakeholder satisfaction as part of its program evaluation process.

Quality Statement 4: Responsible Governance

A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.

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Characteristics	Score
<i>4.1- Ensure that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner</i>	3
<i>4.2- Monitor the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate</i>	3
<i>4.3- Seek input from impacted stakeholders</i>	3
<i>4.4- Enact policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter</i>	3
<i>4.5- Actively engage the school's authorizer in monitoring the school's educational program and its fiscal status</i>	3
Overall Statement Ranking/Avg. Score	3

Quality Characteristic 4.1: <i>Ensure that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner</i>	Rubric Score 3
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The governing board of Alianza Charter School is the governing board of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), which have clear policies established for addressing conflicts of interest and for ensuring public input and participation. Additionally, Alianza has an Advisory Board which provides input and feedback to staff and to the PVUSD.

Quality Characteristic 4.2: <i>Monitor the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Although individuals on the PVUSD Board and administration support charter schools, many do not monitor the trends and changes in the charter school movement. Michael Jones, principal of Alianza Charter School, however, is an active member on the Association's member council and provides regular updates on charter school issues to the school's leadership team.

In 2004, a fairly contentious battle resulted between Alianza and the school district over the location and site of the school. The dispute was taken to court. There is now a settlement on the issue; however, many of Alianza's leadership and advisory board is exploring at a more independent governance structure.

Quality Characteristic 4.3: <i>Seek input from impacted stakeholders</i>	Rubric Score 3
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The PVUSD Board holds its meetings in accordance with the Brown Act. The Alianza Advisory Council is made up of Parent representatives and staff members who represent their constituent groups (eg: Migrant parents or the 3rd Grade Team of teachers) who provide leadership and school plan oversight to the school community.

Parents and teachers are notified of Advsoy Board meetings through announcements in the school bi-weekly newsletter "Accents". Many teachers also call parents to encourage their attendance. All agendas and meeting notes from the Advisory Board are published both on paper and the web. They are distributed at the following Alianza Council meeting. Alianzas collaborative teaching model and teacher planning times also allow for significant input from the instructional staff.

Quality Characteristic 4.4: <i>Enact policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Because it is a dual language program, all communications are provided to stakeholders in English and in Spanish. All staff of Alianza are bilingual. Up until 2004-2005, Alianza was a district school and had to adhere to the district-established attendance boundaries. The neighborhoods and student population from the attendance geography prevented the school from fully implementing a dual immersion program outlined in its charter (the school had a 95%/5% mix if Spanish speakers vs. English speakers).

This year, Alianza opened as a true “school of choice.” The school has made significant effort in a recruiting the target population outlined in its charter. Staff have already noticed changes in the student population in the kindergarden classes and are hopeful that this will lead to a stronger dual immersion model.

Quality Characteristic 4.5: <i>Actively engage the school’s authorizer in monitoring the school’s educational program and its fiscal status</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Alianza essentially operates as a district school. PVUSD monitors Alianza’s fiscal and educational programs as it does with all its schools. (More recently a court settlement between the school and the district resulted in MOUs which describe the relationship of Alianza Charter School with the Pajaro Valley Unified School District.)

Quality Statement 5: Fiscal Accountability A Charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school engages in an annual financial audit which is made public.

Characteristics	Score
<i>5.1- Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school's educational program and ensure financial stability</i>	4
<i>5.2- Engages an annual financial audit which is made public</i>	3
<i>5.3- Establishes clear fiscal policies to ensure that public funds are used appropriately and wisely</i>	4
<i>5.4- Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school's purpose: student achievement of learning goal</i>	4
Overall Statement Ranking/Avg. Score	3.75

Quality Characteristic 5.1: <i>Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school's educational program and ensure financial stability</i>	Rubric Score 4
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Although Alianza Charter School is a district-dependent school, it is allowed site-based management of its own budget. The principal of the school works with the district's business manager annually to develop detailed budget assumptions for income and expenditures. All accounts are paid through the district, and the working budget is monitored monthly by the school principal. Over the past several years, Alianza has managed to build a reserve of approximately \$800,000.00.

Quality Characteristic 5.2: <i>Engages an annual financial audit which is made public</i>	Rubric Score 3
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Alianza is audited through the PVUSD. The school, however, does not have a school-specific audit; and often do not receive a copy of the district's audit.

Quality Characteristic 5.3: <i>Establishes clear fiscal policies to ensure that public funds are used appropriately and wisely</i>	Rubric Score 4
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Alianza Charter School adheres to all of PVUSD's fiscal policies and procedures and follows the same process as the district office.

Quality Characteristic 5.4: <i>Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school's purpose: student achievement of learning goal</i>	Rubric Score 4
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The school uses its site-based management of funds in accordance with its charter. A significant investment, for instance, is made to substitute to allow for grade-level planning time. Alianza has also made investment in reducing class size in upper grades from 32:1 to 25:1, providing safety net resources for students working below grade level, technology resources, etc.

**California Charter Schools Association
Summary of Recommendations and Commendations**

COMMENDATIONS

The Alianza Leadership Team and staff are a strong collegial group of educators who are meaningfully committed to student achievement. The Association's Site Visit team commends Alianza Elementary School on the following:

- Alianza is clearly implementing the educational program outlined in the school's charter – the vision and mission of the school is demonstrated in daily action and practice. Stakeholders are clearly aligned with and strongly support a strong dual language program.
- The school environment is healthy, safe and nurturing – stakeholders feel a sense of “family,” culture and purpose at the school
- There is clearly a strong sense of collegiality and collaboration among the school staff
- Alianza has a strong shared leadership model in which there is mutual respect and strong sense of loyalty to each other and the school community. The school leadership also has a solid grasp of charter law and state student accountability measures.
- Staff development and school resources have clearly been allocated for the purposes of student achievement.
- Students feel strong support by teachers and staff.
- The district administration and board have committed to working with the charter school in ensuring that educational alternatives are offered in the district.
- The school has accumulated a solid financial reserve fund over the past few years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

*Recommendations are grouped into two categories: 1) **opportunities for improvement**; which school leaders may choose to implement over the medium to long-term; and 2) **areas for immediate action**, which reflect issues which will likely require immediate action in order to safeguard the integrity of school business operations or to address serious challenges to student learning.*

Opportunities for Improvement:

- A. Evidence longitudinal growth of student achievement within student sub-groups against other schools with similar student populations, including:
 1. What is the “value add” of Alianza's dual language program?
 2. Would student ultimately achieve greater social and academic gains by

attending Alianza than by attending another school?

The school should clearly define its academic, social and emotional student goals and develop clear means of assessing progress on those goals.

- B. As Alianza grows in grade-levels, the school will need to consider a more strategic approach to developing a comprehensive a “middle school” program – one that would more fully support the affective and cognitive development of middle school students.
- C. Although the charter school has good communication and a solid working relationship with the district, Alianza still needs to further articulate its role within all the educational options provided in PVUSD.

Areas for Immediate Action:

- D. Develop clear strategic plan for academic growth. Alianza Charter School has undergone several structural changes over the past few years, including the advent of state and federal accountability measures, change in site, becoming a “true” school of choice in the district, etc.... This has resulted in Alianza taking a “reactive” stance to changes, rather than pro-active. We recommend that the Alianza team undergo, this next year, a strategic planning process in which the school community develops a multi-year plan of action which addresses:
 - 1. student performance goals and targets
 - 2. enrollments policies
 - 3. alternative student assessments
 - 4. uniform collection of student performance data
 - 5. aggregating student data
 - 6. schoolwide systemic review of student performance data
- E. Based on the academic strategic plan, the school needs to research and develop the appropriate fiscal, governance and operational structures to support the school’s mission and goals. This would also provide more a pro-active approach to utilizing and maximizing the school’s flexibility under the charter law. We recommend that the Alianza team undergo, this next year, a strategic planning process in which the school community develops a multi-year plan of action which considers the following operational issues:

1. academic autonomy
2. fiscal autonomy
3. governance (including, but not limited to clear delineation of powers and authority from PVUSD, establishing a 501(c) 3, remaining under the jurisdiction of PVUSD)
4. revising current MOUs
5. student support services currently provided by the district
6. human resources

Association and School Follow-up Process: The Association will schedule a follow-up half-day site visit in Spring 2006 to assess the progress of the school based on the recommendations above.

Attachment A:

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

QUALITY STATEMENTS FOR CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Introduction

The mission of the California Charter Schools Association is to *increase student achievement by strengthening and expanding public charter schools throughout California.*

From the moment a charter school petition is approved, its leaders enter into a pact, providing accountability for high student achievement in exchange for autonomy from onerous state regulations and requirements. Our ability as individuals and as a movement to live up to that bargain will determine the strength and sustainability of the charter school movement. It is not enough for charter schools to be merely as good (or as bad) as non-charter public schools, we must be better. We owe it to the students to be better. Moreover, all across the state, charter schools are proving that there is no excuse for schools that fail our students. When high expectations, strong teaching practices, supportive learning environments, and fiscal accountability are aligned, students achieve. We can and must be that beacon of hope and proof that democracy must not give up on public education—that all students will achieve if we teach them.

Background

The Charter Schools Act of 1992 provided opportunities for teachers, parents, pupils and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure as a method to: 1) improve pupil learning, 2) increase learning opportunities for all pupils, 3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, 4) create professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site, 5) provide expanded choices in the types of opportunities that are available within the public school system, and 6) hold schools accountable for meeting measurable pupil outcomes.

The underlying intent of the law was the creation of a school-centered, performance-based accountability system that would provide competition within the public school system and stimulate continual improvement in *all* public schools. The “license to dream” provided by the charter law led to the creation of hundreds of charter schools in the state.

Today, over a decade later, California's charter schools reflect a variety of educational visions, pedagogical approaches, student populations, and organizational designs, which make them uniquely varied and complex. The California Charter Schools Association values all types of charter school programs focused on helping students succeed in learning and in life. Diversity enriches the educational landscape.

We believe, in addition, that *all* charter schools in this state are bound by the commitment to improve educational opportunities for California's children. Our schools do not merely provide educational options, they must provide *better* options. By starting or operating a charter school, charter leaders have chosen to be accountable to their students and communities. Indeed, the success of charter schools in this state will depend upon the actions and choices for which individuals in the charter movement bear ethical, as well as professional responsibility. We believe that by conducting themselves in the manner characterized below, charter school leaders will capture the vision of quality educational opportunity, accountability for student learning, and the spirit of educational renewal embodied in the original charter law.

The California Charter Schools Association is committed to supporting all charter schools in reaching excellence through meeting quality standards. The Member Council pledges to work with all charter school leaders to meet these standards.

Quality Statement 1: Student Academic Achievement First

A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards and closing achievement gaps of students.

Characteristics

A quality charter school . . .

- Achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards
- Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement
- Provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student
- Implements and directs learning experiences (consistent with the school's purpose and charter) that actively engage students
- Allocates appropriate resources in the way of instructional materials, staffing and facilities to promote high levels of student achievement
- Supports students in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment characterized by trust, caring and professionalism

- Productively engages parental and community involvement as a part of the school's support system
- Shares its vision among the school community and demonstrates its mission in daily action and practice

Quality Statement 2: Ethical Leadership

The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.

Characteristics

A quality charter school leader . . .

- Effectively communicates and engages stakeholders in the vision and mission of the school
- Consistently puts into practice the educational program outlined in its charter
- Generates and sustains a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
- Regularly monitors and evaluates the success of the school's program
- Provides regular, public reports on the school's progress towards achieving its goals to the school community and to the school's authorizer
- Makes management decisions with the goal of optimizing successful teaching and learning experiences
- Treats all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect
- Has a cogent understanding of the laws that govern charter schools and monitors the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate
- Uses his/her influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success
- Abstains from any decision involving a potential or actual conflict of interest
- Respects diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter
- Engages community involvement in the school

Quality Statement 3: Continuous Focus on Increasing Quality

A charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.

Characteristics

A quality charter school . . .

- Uses information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies for self-examination and improvement

- Establishes benchmarks and a variety of accountability tools for monitoring student progress
- Establishes both long and short term goals and plans for accomplishing the school's mission as stated in its charter
- Uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction
- Uses the results of evaluation and assessment as the basis for the allocation of resources for programmatic improvement
- Involves staff, students, parents and other stakeholders in its accountability for student learning and in the school's program evaluation process

Quality Statement 4: Responsible Governance

A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.

Characteristics

A quality charter school board and administration . . .

- Ensure that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner
- Monitor the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate
- Seek input from impacted stakeholders
- Enact policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter
- Actively engage the school's authorizer in monitoring the school's educational program and its fiscal status

Quality Statement 5: Fiscal Accountability

A charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school engages in an annual financial audit which is made public.

Characteristics

A quality charter school . . .

- Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school's educational program and ensure financial stability
- Engages an annual financial audit which is made public
- Establishes clear fiscal policies to ensure that public funds are used appropriately and wisely
- Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school's purpose: student achievement of learning goals

Resources

California Charter Schools Association Quality Statements are adopted and modified from WASC/Charter Schools *Focus on Learning* (2004), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium *Standards for School Leadership* (1996), and the CCSA Membership Council (2004).

The California Charter Schools Association also acknowledges the work done by the former California Network of Educational Charters in defining exemplary charter school operations.

California Charter Schools Association

Statement Ranking and Scoring Guidelines:

Each time a Quality Site Visit is performed, including visits done by third party agencies, the criteria evaluated in the *Site Visit Report* will be aligned with the Association's Quality Statements for Charter School Operations. Each Quality Statement has a number of *High Quality Indicators* that provide schools with criteria for evaluating its school operations against each statement. The High Quality Indicators are intended to assist charter schools in aligning themselves with the Association's Quality Statements for Charter School Operations. They are also intended to assist schools in the development of a "balanced scorecard" of measures that address other important dimensions of student and school performance in addition to standardized tests and thereby counter-balance the single-minded focus on API and AYP.

Using the high quality indicators found in the Association's Self-Assessment Tool, the school will score itself against each indicator found within each one of the five quality statements. The visiting team will then verify or modify the score based on their findings during the Quality Site Visit. The school will then receive a ranking for each one of the Quality Statements based on the self-assessment and the visiting committee observations. The final *Site Visit Report* will be based on the schools self-assessment, narrative observations, the findings of the visiting team and the Statement Rankings

The Statement Rankings are as follows:

<p>Fully Aligned with Statement Indicators= a 4 point average on the Statement Indicators</p> <p>The results of the self-assessment and the visit provide evidence that the school is fully aligned with the indicators found within the given Quality Statement.</p>
<p>Mostly Aligned with Statement Indicators= a 3 point average or higher on the Statement Indicators</p> <p>The results of the self-assessment and the visit provide evidence that the school is mostly aligned with the indicators found within the given Quality Statement.</p>
<p>Somewhat Aligned with Statement Indicators= a 2 point average or higher on the Statement Indicators</p> <p>The results of the self-assessment and the visit provide evidence that the school is somewhat aligned with the indicators found within the given Quality Statement.</p>
<p>Little or No Alignment with Statement Indicators= lower than a 2 point average on the Statement Indicators</p> <p>The results of the self-assessment and the visit provide little or no evidence that the school is aligned with the indicators found within the given Quality Statement.</p>