

**LAGUNITAS
SCHOOL
DISTRICT**



*“Support Education in the
Lagunitas School District”*

Long Range Plan

2004 through 2007

Prepared by LSD Long Range Planning Committee

APPRECIATIONS

The long range planning process has been financially supported by a grant from Marin County District Four Supervisor Steve Kinsey and matching donations from San Geronimo Valley residents. Lagunitas School Savers Foundation has served as fiscal agent for the project. Babs Kavanaugh of BK Consulting has guided our School District through this important process, which will serve the children of the San Geronimo Valley well into the future.

The Long Range Planning Committee wishes to thank:

- The Board of Trustees for their endorsement and support of the planning process and
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I. INTRODUCTION

Lagunitas School District

Lagunitas School District is located in Marin County, north of San Francisco. The district serves the four villages of Forest Knolls, Lagunitas, San Geronimo, and Woodacre, which comprise the unincorporated area of the San Geronimo Valley. The San Geronimo Valley is a rural community in the geographically isolated interior of Marin County. In a county known for its affluence, this rural area of approximately 4,000 residents includes significant numbers of unemployed and lower-income working class families living in modest housing and having limited local employment, education and recreational opportunities. A high proportion of the children in the community live in single-parent families. The community has a heterogeneous population including professionals, tradesmen and women, local business people, artists, artisans, and people with limited incomes. Out of the unique needs of this diverse, though relatively small population, the district's unique programs of learning have evolved.

The district is comprised of two schools that are adjacent to one other. San Geronimo is a K-6 school with approximately 100 students. Lagunitas is a K-8 school with approximately 200 students (2001-02). Since 1972, Lagunitas School District has provided alternative educational programs with differing approaches to education. Presently, the school district currently operates 3 district programs: K-5 Public Montessori, K-6 Open Classroom, and a 6-8th Grade Middle School Program. A Waldorf Inspired program will open in the fall of 2004. Parents are oriented to multiple programs before deciding in which program to enroll their child. In March of each year, parents are surveyed to select their students' program preference each year.

Lagunitas School District has 12 classrooms, 14 classroom teachers, approximately 14 aids, 1.8 Resource Specialists, a .80 School Social Worker, a .80 Superintendent/Principal, and many parent volunteers.

History of the School District

Alternative educational programs have been a major characteristic in the history of Lagunitas School District over the past three decades. The basic tenet of offering Parental Choice, that children learn best when they are in a program that addresses their individual character and learning needs, has played a major role in creating and maintaining these educational programs. In the early 1970s, Lagunitas offered the first alternative program, the Open Classroom, which emphasized respect for the individual and individual learning styles, emotional growth and freedom of choice. Over the next decade, Academics and Enrichment was formed out of a merging of programs with the existing traditional elementary philosophy, emphasizing basic academic skills and independent study habits. The county's first public Montessori classes for elementary grades was launched in Lagunitas in 1982.

Beginning with a single K-2 class, it grew to include multi-graded classes, covering grades K-5. Though adapted to the public school setting, the program reflects the philosophical commitment of Montessori to the “discovery of the child” and “education for peace.” In addition to these programs, the option of independent study or home study was initiated in 1988.

The school board has provided for parent involvement in the selection of new teachers for the programs. The board, whose membership is open to parents, staff and community members, authorizes hiring committees.

Although the district has three distinct philosophical programs on two campuses, a sense of school community on a district-wide basis is promoted and encouraged. Planning for student success involves each of the school communities to ensure content and grade level articulation. The existence of separate programs requires continual effort to maintain staff communication and school-wide continuity. Regular school-wide staff meetings, all day staff development workshops and weekly program planning serve to facilitate this process.

II. THE PLANNING PROCESS

Process Chronology

The effort to develop a rational, community based plan for the future of the Lagunitas School District began in spring, 2003. Although the district has managed to maintain two out of its three highly individualized elementary programs (the Montessori and Open Classroom options) and sufficient staffing to continue a departmentalized middle school (grades 6-8) several compelling challenges were facing the district. From a financial perspective these challenges included a gradual but continuous decline in student population and significant anticipated reductions in school state funding as a result of the statewide budgetary crisis that was severe enough to prompt the successful recall of the current governor. The school district was also clearly suffering from the lack of effective communication processes between the many groups with stakes in our schools including parents, school staff, administration, the school board of trustees and the students themselves. These communication breakdowns, coupled with an environment of continual financial pressures, too often resulted in difficult exchanges between the very community leaders who were best equipped to generate positive solutions to the challenges at hand. Because the Lagunitas School District, and in particular the school board, operates in a very open and public format these confrontational exchanges were often very publicly aired.

As a result of these combined pressures the public perception of the school district, and the educational opportunities it was able to offer the children of San Geronimo Valley, were in jeopardy. In April 2003 the school board received a letter signed by several community members that articulated two clear points. First, several of the parties responsible for the essential operation of our school district were not always acting in a productive, professional manner that reflected the principles and values that we, as a community, want to convey to our children. In the view of the letter's authors this lack of conscious, respectful communication and leadership was generating serious negative consequences for the district throughout the community. Second, we as a school district and as a community needed to come together to carefully identify the goals and vision for our schools to most effectively utilize the limited resources available to us.

In response to this letter the board of trustees agreed that a strategic planning process might successfully address many of the concerns stated by the community during the past several years. They also agreed that the school board and administration needed to begin to replace reaction and crisis management with proactive planning in order to succeed in maintaining the high quality of education currently provided in our schools. However, both the school board and administration lacked structural components and resources needed to make this transition. To this end the school board authorized the formation of a long range planning committee. The committee recruited parents, school board members, administrators, teachers and an experienced facilitator to lead the development of a

comprehensive long-range plan. The intended purpose of this committee was not to direct the development of the plan but to organize and summarize community input and directives so that the final plan would reflect the interests, desires and values of the community as a whole rather than that of the individuals working directly on the plan. The use of an experienced outside consultant, Babs Kavanaugh, helped to ensure the unbiased development of our plan.

Appreciative Inquiry

The direction and intention of the planning efforts was guided by an approach known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is an approach to organizational change that engages the entire system in a discovery process about what works within an organization. AI seeks to inquire, find out, ask questions about, and discover. It brings to light an appreciation of the organization, by focusing on values, assets, strengths, best practices, successes and innovations that give life to the organization. Because the process is grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success and envision a future based on the reality of the actual past. The entire system maintains the best of the past by discovering what it is and stretching it into future possibilities.

The long range planning process was designed to gather cross constituency support for the plan and invited individuals inside and outside the district to reflect together, research together, and agree on specific results to accomplish the intent of the long-range plan.

The Long Range Planning Committee and Community Participation

Central to the long range planning process was a community involvement effort that is impressive in its scope and intensity. Approximately 300-350 contacts were made with parents, staff and community members over the 13 months of planning.

The Long Range Planning Committee

Ace Thelin	Jim Fazackerley	Miranda Staats
Alan Weiler	Judy Voets	Richard Sloan
Amy Valens	Karen Voets	Rosie Tajeda
Dave Cort	Kelly O'Connor	Sally Hutchinson
Denise Bohman	Maiya Finch	Stephanie O'Brien
Doug Fraser	Mary Buttler	Steve Rebscher
Harold Hedelman	Michelle Benjamin	Thelma Weiss

Babs Kavanaugh – Project Facilitator

The community participation process included the following components:

- 3 community workshops (6/12/03; 10/21/03; 1/27/04) with approximately 40 parents and Valley residents attending each of the community meetings.
- A newsletter sent to all parents summarizing the input from each workshop.
- A staff workshop (8/21/03) with 17 Certificated and Classified Staff Members attending.
- A joint meeting of the Lagunitas School Board and the Long Range Planning Committee.
- A survey (Winter 2004) to the community to gather input on the prioritization of Long Range Plan goals.
- Ongoing meetings of the Long Range Planning Committee from May 2003-June 2004 (approx 18).

Public Input

Creating a long-range plan is the first step in generating positive change. To successfully implement the plan requires broad-based support from the many groups that make up our school community. In the Lagunitas School District the schools serve as a focal point for many activities beyond the children's education. These include recreational programs, social services and health programs for all age groups. For this reason the long range plan involved a cross section of ideas and input from all community members. To gather views from these many perspectives the long range planning committee organized a series of four workshops over a period of eight months.

The first step in this information gathering process began with defining the community beliefs about how education works best. At our first community workshop the facilitator, Babs Kavanaugh, asked each of the 40-45 participants what they believed were the best conditions for learning. Each participant participated in a carousel activity and responded with one or more written comments to generate statements of "I believe..." to the following questions:

I believe students succeed best when...

I believe a quality educational program includes...

I believe a successful teacher is...

I believe the role of parents in our school is...

I believe a successful student is one that...

I believe a healthy school community partnership is one in which...

I believe a successful school board is...

I believe a dynamic and innovative classroom is one in which...

I believe a successful administration is...

From this process the workshop generated over three hundred individual comments. Taken together these ideas form a vision of what our school community expects from our schools and gave us a framework to within which to ask the next level of questions – What would our ideal school look like? Where are we now? And how can we get from here to there? School staff addressed the same questions in a subsequent meeting in August.

The next step in the process was to review and incorporate the public input in developing the goals and objectives for planning for the future of the district. In the second workshop community members were asked to list the challenges that stand between where we now perceive our schools and the ideals generated during the first workshop. In the second half of the meeting participants listed the resources we share to meet those challenges and possible ways to address these areas of concern. At the close of the workshop we discussed the existing mission statement for the school district and a vision statement prepared by the Long Range Planning committee after the first workshop.

Following the second community workshop the Long Range Planning Committee met several times to clarify the major goals generated in the two workshops and to summarize the proposed objectives to accomplish those goals. These goals and objectives were discussed in detail in a third community workshop January 27, 2004. At this time the committee was particularly interested in insuring that each concern or comment from the planning process had been accurately reflected in the draft goals, objectives and vision statement. A number of additions and modifications were incorporated at that meeting and the revised goals were presented in a survey format to the community to assess their prioritization of the goals. Approximately 25 responses to the survey were received, many with very detailed, constructive comments. These priorities and comments were used to further revise the scope of the plan and assign priority status as either short term or long term.

Planning Assumptions

The following assumptions guided the long-range plan development:

- All long range priorities and activities build on Lagunitas School District's internal strengths and take advantage of the external collaborative and partnership opportunities, while minimizing weaknesses and threats.
- The defined goals and objectives involve choices on how best to accomplish the district's mission.
- The long-range plan is intended to enhance the district's ability to think and act strategically. The plan addresses being intentional and strategic rather than reactive and operational.
- The implementation of the long-range priorities will be accomplished simultaneously with the continued focus on the existing work.

III. LONG RANGE PLAN 2004-2007

The Long Range Plan includes the following components:

- A reaffirmation of the District's mission
- The core beliefs and the vision statement
- Priority focus areas with goals and objectives for years 2004-2007
- A recommendation for implementation and ongoing evaluation of the planning process.

A. MISSION, VISION, AND CORE BELIEFS

*The long standing **Mission Statement** of the Lagunitas School District guides the educational culture of the Valley. During the second community workshop on October 21, 2003, the group consensus was to reaffirm the mission without change.*

Lagunitas School District Mission Statement

We are a community, committed to continuous improvement in our educational effectiveness, aimed at fulfilling the needs of each individual student. We strive for quality, balancing academic excellence, social awareness, civic responsibility, and self esteem in a safe and attractive learning environment where all participants benefit. We value parental choice and involvement, collaborating with staff, students, and Board, to ensure that programs continue to be responsive, operations become ever more efficient, and educational opportunity continues to be optimized.

Core Beliefs

***The Core Beliefs** represent the district's highest priorities and deeply held driving forces. These core beliefs were generated during the first community workshop and reviewed and modified in the second workshop (October 21, 2003).*

We Believe...

- Children come first – Every child in our community deserves a quality education.
- The school district is successful when the community has shared goals and a shared vision for the future.
- The school district is successful when parents and community members are heard, supported, involved and participate to the best of their ability in the activities of the district.

- An effective teacher is passionate about learning, passionate about teaching and inspires critical thinking and self-direction.
- The ideal classroom is joyous, imaginative, engaging, cooperative, self-motivating, challenging and diverse.
- Children learn best when they are comfortable with their environment, in a low stress, safe and joyful atmosphere.
- Standards of academic excellence must embrace the whole child.
- A well-balanced curriculum includes art, music, environmental education, strong academics, and measurability of academic progress.
- Everyone in the learning community deserves respect. Open dialogue is encouraged among all partners (students, teachers, school administration, school board, parents, families and the community).
- Problems are best solved when all stakeholders actively participate in the district and schools' processes.
- An effective school board is representative of the community, fiscally responsible, well informed, accountable, trustworthy, cooperative and proactive.

Vision Statement

The Vision is a broad statement designed to convey the community's vision of the ideal future based on tangible signs of success.

- A school district where the educational, social, emotional and personal needs of all students are met with programs that address individual requirements.
- A school district with the independence to follow goals defined by community driven priorities.
- A school district where parents, teachers, the school board, administration and students share roles, participate in governance and cooperate in all aspects of our school's operations.
- A school district that operates from a proactive, fiscally sound plan for the future that draws from committed, long-term community support to offer our children the education each and every one of them deserves.

B. OVERVIEW OF LONG RANGE PRIORITIES

The Long Range Plan is organized into five focus areas:

- Communication and Community Collaborations
- Staff Recruitment and Retention
- Educational Programs and Services
- Finance and Facilities
- Governance

The goals and objectives within each focus area represent the targeted new activities that must be accomplished to ensure the sustainability of the district programs and enhance the performance of the district. The prioritization of short and long term implementation is based on responses to the community survey.

Communication and Community Collaborations

The challenges facing the Lagunitas School District can only be successfully overcome with a well coordinated effort backed by the community. The planning and coordination that is an essential element of this success is addressed in large part by this Long Range Plan. Implementation of the plan will depend upon ongoing, broad based community input. Many of the concerns voiced during the planning workshops expressed the need to improve our avenues of communication, i.e. to make information about our schools, their operation and governance more accessible to parents and community members and to provide open, respectful processes for all members of our community to participate.

Participants in the planning process saw a number of issues of perception that could be addressed by working in this focus area including:

Quality. Many families in the Valley don't know that the District consistently provides students a high quality education. Some families believe that more Valley students go to private schools than elsewhere in the county. In fact, the District is very similar to other districts in this regard.

Responsiveness. Many families don't realize how responsive Board, administration and staff are to input from parents.

Enrollment. Efforts to more comprehensively communicate the District's strengths will improve enrollment.

We're a community school! Few families outside the District realize the extent to which collaborations with agencies outside the school enrich all our lives.

Goal: Create effective open communication processes that value all voices and create a trusting, positive relationship within the community.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a coordinated communications program for the district that includes programs, administration, parent body, school board, students and the community, that utilizes the existing communication plan. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively inform families about educational opportunities within the district e.g. identify and expand on successful student and family recruiting methods. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, articulate, communicate and model open and fair conflict resolution processes to meet the concerns of our diverse community. 		X

Because our schools have developed as an integral part of the San Geronimo Valley community there are many opportunities to create or expand meaningful collaborations. Health, nutrition, recreation, art, music and garden programs are only a few of the existing collaborative efforts. Further development of these partnerships is seen as an excellent way to maintain exciting, diverse educational opportunities in the presence of growing financial constraint.

Goal: Develop and broaden community wide collaborative efforts on behalf of children.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize, promote, strengthen, and support the relationship between the District, the Community Center and the Healthy Community Collaborative Partners. 		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a coordinated communications program that will celebrate, educate and inform the local communities and outlying areas about the full spectrum of district strengths through the widest possible range of channels. 	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate at the county, state and federal levels to address identified district needs. 		X

Staff Recruitment and Retention

Many comments during our community workshops stated that teachers and staff are the heart of our three academic programs. Because of the severe fiscal constraints of our district the salary support for our staff is among the lowest in Marin County and there is concern both for the welfare of current staff and for our ability to attract creative, outstanding staff and administrators in the future. A solution to the long standing challenge of how to align the collective rights of teaching staff with the specialized needs of unique programs and high level of input from parent groups was also a primary, interrelated concern.

Goal: Recruit, support and retain highly qualified staff at all levels of the district.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
• Develop and implement a hiring / transfer policy that balances teacher rights, parent choice, and program integrity.	X	X
• Determine staffing needs in administration that are required to sustain district operations and fulfill the district mission/vision.	X	X
• Make it a high priority within our district budgetary process to increase the salary schedule for our staff at each level to equal the 25th percentile among school districts in Marin County within five years.	X	X
• Identify and pursue revenue sources for staff professional development.	X	X
• Develop a timely recruitment process that communicates the district's strengths to prospective teachers, including the attractive educational philosophies of our programs and the beautiful setting of our campus.	X	X

Educational Programs and Services

In comment after comment the parents of children in our school district expressed a very high level of satisfaction and appreciation for the quality of the education their children were receiving and the diversity of programs and individual learning opportunities provided. Within this small district there are seven separate music programs, art programs, an ecological preserve and environmental education curriculum, physical education and healthy body awareness programs, etc. These programs are highly valued and their maintenance and development are high priorities within the community.

Goal: Ensure that the Lagunitas School District multi-choice program survives and diversity flourishes.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
• Clearly review and articulate the shared educational principles and those that distinguish Open Classroom, Montessori, Waldorf Inspired, and the Middle School.	X	
• Identify and pursue funding to support parental training and volunteer involvement in the classroom and with school programs.		X

Goal: Continue to support learning programs that ensure each child receives individualized instruction and assessment

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
• Explore ways to create an individual program with documentation for every student in the district.		X
• Implement multiple measures of evaluation and assessment of learning within each program.		X

Goal: Sustain and expand enrichment curricula in each of the District programs

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue funding avenues to expand enrichment (e.g. art, music, foreign language, environmental education, physical education and technology) in all programs. 	X	X

Finance

Because of the complex way that education is funded in California the Lagunitas School District receives the lowest funding per student in the county. In addition, our district and all other West Marin school districts are slowly losing students as the cost of homes exceeds the level which many families with children can afford. Declining enrollment directly affects our ability to cover fixed costs of administration, facilities maintenance, water and insurance. It is clear that the board of trustees and the district administration have acted heroically to maintain the quality of our educational programs in the face of this declining support. However, it is equally clear that unless we as a community make fundamental changes in the way we plan and support our educational programs we will face reductions in the number of choices or the quality of our children’s education in the future. The community workshops yielded three areas focused on these financial realities: better communication of clear, understandable financial information and choices; development of coordinated, goal oriented fundraising efforts and an ongoing examination of what aspects of our programs are essential to our primary educational goals.

Goal: Create an open, community-wide financial process that guarantees consistent support through broad-based participation in planning and cost-effective funding of district programs.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a fiscal advisory committee. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate existing financial condition. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop and strengthen School Savers Foundation's role in fundraising for the district. 	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a district wide fundraising policy that supports the overall fiscal health of the district and supports program choice. 		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for reducing the need for funds or develop strategies to streamline operations and redirect cost savings into programs and children's services. 		X

Facilities

One area of our school's operation that is particularly hard hit during periods of declining student population are fixed overhead costs. Optimum usage of facilities and carefully planned maintenance were seen as essential to providing an excellent environment for learning. Because many groups within the community use the buildings and recreational space of the school district future plans for these facilities become truly community wide issues.

Goal: Ensure safe, well-maintained, optimally sized and appropriately equipped schools that provide adequate and flexible space for students and community members to learn, play, and socialize in a community school setting.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
• Evaluate the Facilities Master Plan.	X	X
• Communicate the Facility Usage Plan.		X
• Identify and pursue funding sources for facilities maintenance and enhancements.		X
• Support the development of a community gymnasium on the school campus.	X	

Governance

The San Geronimo Valley has been very active in determining how our schools should be run and how our children are educated. Historically, this activism led to the creation of several individualized elementary school programs. Each of these programs addressed the specific desires of different groups of parents and the specific needs of different children. It was very clear during the development of this plan that a broad cross section of the community wants to maintain both the unique, individualized emphasis of our educational programs and values the opportunity for parents, and all community members, to participate in its governance. It is clear that access to information and a responsive administrative structure are essential to those goals.

Goal: Define and implement an accessible, transparent and democratic governance structure that ensures open and inclusive policymaking and emphasizes effective implementation of these policies.

Objectives	Short Term	Long Term
• Develop methods and tools so that people know how to obtain information to participate in decision making for the district.	X	
• Increase student involvement and empowerment in governance	X	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specific ways to increase community and parent participation and input from all sectors, including those who do not regularly speak up. 	<p>X</p>
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C. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The development of the Lagunitas School District Long Range Plan has been sustained in its work by a dedicated Long Range Planning Committee. The Long Range Planning Committee has allowed the District to extend the resources and to enhance the critical and deliberative thinking of the Lagunitas School Board.

The Committee recommends the following actions to the Board in order to maintain the momentum and move to the implementation phase.

1. The Board agrees to utilize the Long Range Plan in all major decision making sessions.
2. The Board will empower the Long Range Planning Committee to oversee the implementation phase of the Long Range Plan and provide quarterly updates on progress to the Board.
3. The Board authorizes the Long Range Planning Committee to collaborate with already existing committees to implement the goals and objectives identified in the plan. These committees could include: Lagunitas School Savers Foundation, The Facilities Committee, The District wide Recruiting Committee, The Healthy Community Collaborative and The Lagunitas School Site Council.
4. The Board and the Long Range Planning Committee will jointly convene an annual community meeting to gather input on the Long Range Planning progress and direction and to review the short and long term priorities.
5. The Board and the Long Range Planning Committee will meet annually in the Fall to discuss implementation of the Long Range Plan.