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## **ROSS VALLEY CHARTER - JUNE ACADEMIC MEMO**

Ross Valley Charter as a State Board of Education authorized public charter school in its first year of operation does not have prior year data to assess and report. However, we are working diligently to ensure that we are meeting the unique needs of our children through our multi-age model and are using a variety of assessments to evaluate the efficacy of our program as we work to continually improve our practices.

### **THE MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM AND ADDRESSING MASTERY OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

RVC students are in classes with two grades together (typically K/1st, 2nd/3rd, 4th/5th). They stay with the same teacher for two years, which enables them to develop a deep, trusting relationship with their teacher. It also means they typically have only three teachers during their elementary school experience, minimizing the anxiety that children often feel as they move into a new school year. At the beginning of the second year with the same teacher, there is no need for a “getting to know you” period; students immediately pick up where they left off academically, with teachers knowing what they need to focus on from day one. Multi-age teachers find the second year with a student to be especially productive, and they enjoy the opportunity to watch children mature over two full years.

Students also get the opportunity to alternate between being a younger and an older student in their classes. The younger students learn from the older and more experienced students. At the beginning of each school year, the older students teach the younger students class protocols so teachers can start instruction on day one rather than having to teach classroom rhythms for the first few weeks. The older students model expected behavior and help welcome the younger children, which supports our school culture of students learning from one another and relying upon each other. When a student asks a teacher a question, the teacher encourages the student to ask a peer who will be able to help. Children become accustomed to helping each other, regardless of being a younger or older student in the classroom.

Students in mixed-age classrooms can represent quite a broad range of developmental levels, academic proficiency, and experience. RVC students become comfortable being in a community with learners at all stages, and with this exposure, they gain respect for individuals learning at their own pace. They gain a greater appreciation for their own progress when they witness others being introduced to skills they themselves have learned previously, and they can envision where their learning will take them as they see what more experienced students are able to achieve.

In multi-age classes, there is a built-in element of differentiation; with a two-year age span, teachers understand that the students are at different developmental stages and they must meet students where they

are developmentally. Indeed, because of this significant span in ages, the imperative for implementing differentiated approaches is “hardwired,” with the curriculum and teaching approaches reflective of this dynamic.

An example of differentiation is when our students do independent reading sessions as part of our Reading Workshop. Students choose books of their own interest and at their own independent reading level, as determined by individual assessments. The students might all be reading books from the same genre, such as Historical Fiction or non-fiction books, but each student will read a book at his or her own appropriate reading level. During Writing Workshop, students might be writing in the same genre, such as personal narrative or persuasive letters, but they will be focusing on different skills according to their own development, and may choose their own topic within a genre. We will expect children to progress at their own rate, and we will guide and support them along the way. For example, teachers will work one-on-one or in small groups with greater frequency with readers who are reading below grade level. Teachers will check in more often with struggling writers during Writing Workshop and offer guidance and instruction at their developmental level. Although we will meet students where they are developmentally, our goal is to support all students so they are able to meet or exceed the expectations of the Common Core.

Teachers also organize centers, in which different activities will be happening in a class at the same time. Often these activities will be open-ended, so children can access them at different levels, and either a teacher or a trained parent volunteer will be available at centers to provide support so that students can work at their appropriate level. Students may stay at a center for as long as needed to complete a task then move on to another center when they are ready. Working in centers helps students to gain confidence and independence so that when they reach the older grades, they are able to manage their time while working independently or with a partner or small group. Students learn to do what is needed to accomplish a task, and take initiative, without awaiting instruction from a teacher.

In the older grades, students often work in collaborative groups to do research, create a project, and prepare to present their learning to others. Students may contribute to the group effort by reading aloud text to the others, taking notes, having discussions, creating a poster or other visual presentation, making a model, writing a song, making costumes, etc. Each group approaches their task based on the strengths and abilities of the students in the group, so the work will be naturally differentiated.

In addition, students may experience that their peers are growing at different rates and they may be at a different stage than others in their class. This situation is typically accepted and embraced in multi-age classes, so competition and comparison is diminished. Rather, children are encouraged to focus on and celebrate their own growth and improvement. Students are taught that their knowledge can be developed through effort. They can focus on improvement instead of worrying about comparing themselves to their classmates. They are encouraged to work hard to learn more. They learn that the goal is not immediate perfection; it is about learning something over time: confronting a challenge and making progress. Research has shown that students who learn this “growth mindset” show greater motivation in school, better grades, and higher test scores. RVC teachers have found that because they have celebrated students’ effort and progress, children seem to feel safe and relaxed in the classroom, and are able to appreciate the successes of themselves and others without as much feeling of competition. When students are able to focus on their own learning, they can make more growth.

The Multi-Age classroom provides the ideal setting for students to master the Common Core State Standards. These standards include a series of rigorous expectations for students in each grade level, and thereby provide benchmarks as to where students ought to be. These standards have become targets for all students to meet or exceed in our differentiated classes. Our teachers use a variety of assessment data to identify students that need additional support in order to reach the standards, and work with them individually and in small groups frequently and with targeted instruction.

### **SUMMARY OF STUDENT ACADEMIC MONITORING, ACHIEVEMENT, AND PROGRESS FOR 2017/18**

In order to ensure the efficacy of our model in meeting the academic needs of our students we monitor academic achievement in a variety of ways. Below you will find detailed description of the methods and results for ELA and Math, followed by a table (see Appendix A) outlining the schedule and purpose for each form of assessment.

#### **DETAILS:**

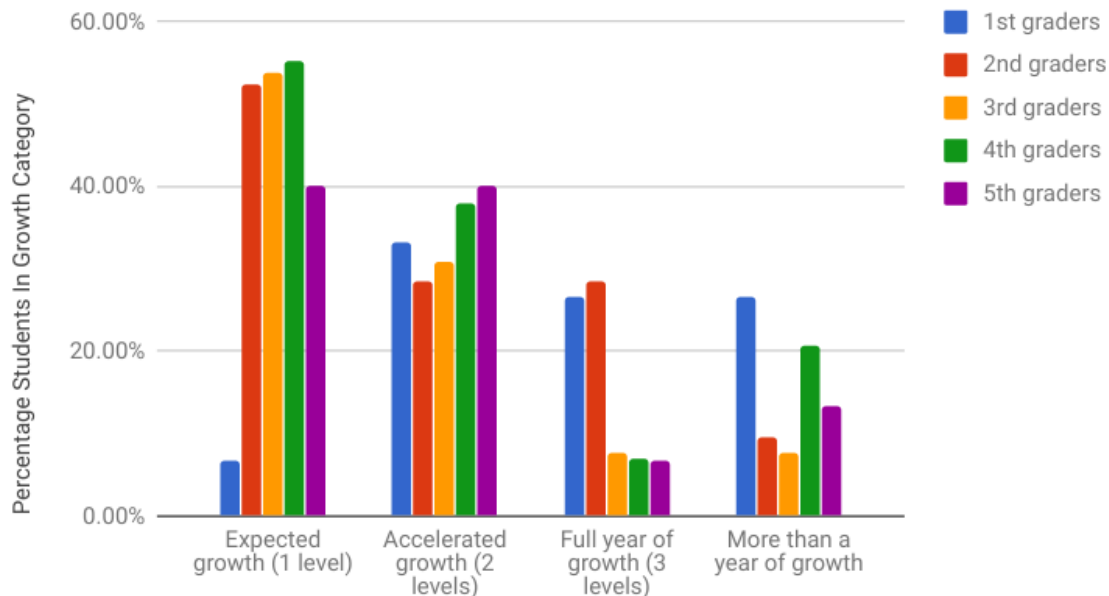
##### Language Arts

Each teacher maintains records on individual students' assessed reading level with notes about their fluency, decoding skills, comprehension, and inference skills. We continue adding to our notes to keep track of each student's progress. We also have an all-school Google doc that records each student's reading level in November and March. We will assess again in June, and start next year with assessments in September, and continue to assess reading levels four times per year. In the Google Doc, we highlight students in yellow who are just below grade level, and highlight students in red who are a year or more below grade level and spend a lot of time reading with those children one-on-one or in small groups.

From November to March 100% of our students increased their reading level by at least one level (see chart below), as measured through Running Records, and 66% of our students have grown by more than one level. 68% of our students are currently at or above grade level benchmarks on the Running Record assessment. Following our March assessments, 16% of 4th and 5th grade students already at level Z, the highest Lucy Calkins level (benchmark for end of sixth grade). Starting in June, we will test Lexile levels on these high achieving students to track progress above level Z.

Writing samples are collected from each student at the beginning of the year to get a baseline of our students' writing ability. Prior to starting a new unit of writing (narrative, informational, opinion), we do an "on demand" writing sample as a baseline for that genre, using Lucy Calkins rubrics to determine areas of focus, and students who will need extra support. At the end of each unit, we do another writing sample and compare with the first sample to note improvement. As of March (end of second trimester), in each 2nd-5th grade class 75-85% of students are meeting or exceeding benchmarks on grade level writing standards taught by this point in the school year.

## Reading Level Growth November to March 2017/18



### Math

In September, each 2nd-5th grade teacher assessed students using an end-of-year general math assessment for the previous grade. Our students, from several different previous schools, came in with a wide variety of math skills and number sense, with many students significantly below grade level. We have since been giving math unit assessments to track our students' progress as compared to the beginning of the year in different domains. In addition, we started using an online math program in January, Zearn (aligned with Eureka/Engage New York math program), to help track student progress. Zearn gives us instant feedback on how fast our students are moving through lessons, when they make repeated mistakes, and areas we need to focus on with them individually. In general, our students who were performing at grade level or above at the beginning of the year are continuing to do so, and our students who were just below grade level at the beginning of the year are now at or above grade level. For our lowest performing students at the beginning of the year, we are seeing growth. As of March (end of second trimester), 75-80% of students at each grade level are meeting or exceeding standards for the math units taught as of this time of year.

We have administered the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks for Math and English-Language Arts (our Chromebooks arrived in November and we began giving assessments in December). Next year we will use the NWEA-MAP assessments in addition to the SBAC Interim Assessments for more actionable, normed data, and we will start earlier in the year with greater consistency.

**NON-ACADEMIC GOALS AND MEASUREMENT OF PROGRESS TOWARD THEM**

In our petition we articulate a Graduate Profile which include the following attributes:

1. Independent and Confident
2. Collaborative Problem Solvers
3. Effective Communicators
4. Creative and Adaptive Thinkers
5. People who Persevere
6. Caring Community Members
7. Solid in Foundational Academic Skills

Our trimester progress reports evaluate each of these attributes with several 21st Century Skill descriptors which are shared with parents each trimester.

**SUMMARY**

Based upon our assessment data collected to date we have found that our program is meeting our students' needs academically. We are on target to advance all of our students at least one grade level in each core subject, and in many cases they have made more than a year's growth prior to the end of the school year. We will continue to collect data (see Appendix A for Assessment Methods and Schedule) so that we may adequately assess the effectiveness of our program and continually improve in our capacity to meet the needs of our students.

**Appendix A:****TABLE OF ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE AND STATED PURPOSE**

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Time Administered</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Kindergarten Round Up	June 2017 June 2018	Assessment of all incoming Kindergarten students for school readiness and any possible special needs performed under a start-up contract with North Coast Special Education JPA.
Baseline English Learner assessment	Sept/Oct 2017 April 2018	All Grades - The English Language development of all EL students is assessed with the "CELDT/ELPAC" assessment.
Baseline and ongoing assessment of reading and writing	Sept-Nov 2017 March 2018 June 2018	All Grades - using Running Records assessment (recommended by Lucy Calkins) and teacher-designed writing assessments.
Baseline and ongoing assessment of math skills	Sept 2017 and following each math unit	Grades 2-5 - using end-of-year assessments from the previous grade in September, and unit assessments throughout the year.
Interim state testing of math and ELA skills	Throughout the 2017-18 School Year	Grades 3-5 - using the state's Common Core-aligned Interim CAASPP assessments.
Intervention Assessment Protocols	Throughout the 2017-18 School Year	All Grades - based on teacher referrals, family requests, and student performance data from baseline testing and from daily classroom assessments via exit tickets, checks for understanding, and lesson/unit assessments or final work products. The implementation of ZEARN blended math program in grades 2-5 starting in January also provides ongoing data and daily feedback on student progress and challenge areas.
Special Education Assessment Protocols	Throughout the 2017-18 School Year	All Grades - based on teacher referrals, family requests, and student performance data from baseline testing and from daily classroom assessments via exit tickets, checks for understanding, and lesson/unit assessments or final work products. We administer specialized assessments, as needed for individual students, with our in-house Special Education teacher

		and through our partnership with North Coast JPA and the El Dorado County SELPA with specialists in a wide range of areas relevant to special education such as: occupational therapy, speech therapy, behavioral management, cognitive development, dyslexia and other learning disabilities, etc.
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