



To: Superintendent Caillier and School Board

From: Riana Bucceri, Taylor Olson, and Gisele Renly

Date: March 2, 2010

Re: Implementation of small class size and E.C.H.O.

Overview

The Woods, a K-12 charter school, is situated in the heart of San Diego. Surrounding it are theaters, top class restaurants, various religious centers, museums, missions, and government offices. The Woods serves a diverse population, both academically and culturally.

Currently The Woods is a traditional school with no choice in learning and large class sizes, these two major issues need to be addressed. Classrooms are 30:1 with no assistance. Hence, academic scores tend to be low. Second, there is disconnection within and between grade levels, the school, and the community. No electives are offered, and classes are driven only by the standards and state tests. Low teacher support and parent involvement is also a negative factor contributing to a decreased student and teacher morale. Students are not being challenged nor are they taught to be problem solvers. They are simply going through the motions until they can move on.

Research

It is a well documented fact that students learn better in a small classroom environment with individualized instruction. This will lead to deeper understanding, higher grades, and test scores.

Research also showed that higher morale and motivation increases if students work with each other and community members. They are able to broaden their understanding of their individual role in both the community and school. Effectively they reinforce their own learning, have choice in what they learn, and increase ownership of their education.

Reform

It is important for our students to focus on cross grade level collaboration, community involvement, and have choice in their education. As educators we see this is possible by lowering the average class size to a 16:2 ratio and though an enrichment block called E.C.H.O. (Encouraging Choice Honors Ourselves). During these classes student will focus on The Woods 4 C's of Learning.

Choice:

By giving students choice in the their education they will have buy-in and take ownership of their learning.

Collaboration:

Collaboration will be extremely important to making E.C.H.O. work. Teachers will be working with each other and students and the school will be working with community members to teach E.C.H.O. classes.

Connection:

Students will see that their learning is meaningful and have an authentic connection to it. Parents will feel involved in their child's education. The School won't continue to be this mysterious place that they never see, understand, or support.

Community:

Our school will be a community of learners working together. The surrounding community and the school won't be disconnected, by having master teachers brought into the school to teach the enrichment block.

We will create a family atmosphere by having all ages in the same class. During these classes there will be opportunities for enrichment, personal growth, and peer mentoring. Students will have the choice of various classes to take: culinary, gardening, theater, digital media, traditional art, religious studies, peer tutoring, languages, community service, and body, mind, and soul. Classes will be instructed by community members that are masters in their respective fields. E.C.H.O. classes will be refined on a continual basis and may be added and dropped from the program as needed. As a celebration of learning The Woods School will host Family Night once a month. All E.C.H.O. classes will be set on a Pass/Fail basis. Participation is key and each student must write a reflection about the experience to get credit for taking the class. All reflection will be kept in the student's file to be review upon leaving The Woods Charter School.

The Stakeholders

First and foremost E.C.H.O. will benefit our students. They will be part of an education that will be truly unique. Teachers and staff will get support and have the opportunity to create a community of learners that currently does not exist. Parents will see their children take ownership of their education and be more involved. Community members will be able to bring their skills into a school environment where they will be welcomed and loved.

Possible Pitfalls

We do understand that there might be some difficulty accommodating all students with such a varied age range. However the pros of E.C.H.O. vastly out weight the cons.

Phase 1-Getting Started**Implementation Process**

To begin the processes of implementing E.C.H.O. into the Woods we must start with the teachers. There needs to be some professional development in the areas of collaboration and integrating curriculum. The school will also recruit master teachers from the community. We will find people who are willing to share their skills with students in our unique school setting.

Once current teachers have been properly trained and master teachers hired, we can sit and create a curriculum. Working together teachers will map out what each course will look like, so as E.C.H.O. spreads to the core classes there will be a model in place.

Phase 2-Next Steps

- Implementation of ECHO block
- Class size is reduced to 16 in all classes (ECHO and core subjects)
- 1 teacher 1 aide in core classes
- Ratio of 5:1 in ECHO classes (1 teacher, 4 master teachers in their field of expertise)
- Multiage in ECHO block (K-12) for:
 - Peer tutoring
 - Enrichment
 - Personal growth
- 90 minute ECHO block before lunch
- Flexible groupings in ECHO
- Understanding that some jobs are age specific
- For example: culinary class
 - Master chefs (number based on enrolled students)
 - Basic kitchen etiquette (multiage)
 - Food preparation
 - Flexible groupings (multiage and age appropriate)
 - Dividing jobs - rotate within multiage
 - Peer mentoring
 - Individual growth
- Serving food (multiage - tables set up family style)
- Clean up (multiage)

Phase 3-Implementation of E.C.H.O. into Core Classes

During the third phased of E.C.H.O. the academic classes will begin to see their curriculum connected with E.C.H.O. Classes will be structured through a combination of project based learning, curriculum collaborated with the masters in the community, making connections to real world situations/environments, and students will have choice in the types of academic classes they attend.

For example students in high school may choose from classes that resemble the lists below:

Example Math Classes:

- Robotics and Mathematics-build working robotic parts and models
- Banking and Skills for Life-checkbook management, interest rates, credit terms, budgeting, investing, and saving

- 3D Modeling/Animation**-physics, architecture, programming, algebra, and geometry skills will be taught on multiple levels and grades
- Business and Life Skills**-creating a small business on campus

Example Science Classes:

- Get Dirty with Earth Science**-takes place in the on campus greenhouse and in the school garden where students study and grow various plant and animal life in connection with the local zoo
- Underwater Life and Biology**-students in multiple grade levels would create, upkeep, and study a variety of tanks filled with various sea life in connection with the local aquarium

Example English Classes:

- Shakespeare and the Modern World**-connecting the old with the new
- The Woods Community**-a monthly literary magazine published online

Example History Classes:

- Intern at the Historical Society**-learn and appreciate community history by getting involved
- The Court System**-intern at the courts and shadow lawyers, judges, etc.

All academic curriculums will eventually be structured and re-created using the philosophy of E.C.H.O. and the four C's of The Woods Charter School.