

Santa Barbara Charter School
Hopes and Aspirations
January, 2015

We recognize that children learn everywhere and all the time. Our job is to notice and capitalize on this fact and provide experiences that maximize a student's opportunities. Our specific mission is to cultivate learning in the areas of the arts, academics, and relationships. **Our greatest hope is to continue providing opportunities for children to learn in a non-traditional setting. In particular, we believe that it is vital for us to make materials-based classroom learning and home-based learning available to our students and the community.**

We are a small school by design. We believe that students thrive in environments where they are known. Relationships are as important for academic development as they are for social and emotional development. The beauty of being small is that our decision making process is flexible and responsive. We can address significant concerns and implement solutions on a school-wide basis in a matter of days. Moreover, we believe that students and teachers are safer in an intimate learning community. **Our dream is to continue providing our students with their education in a small school setting. We want the entire staff to know every student, so that children are seen and heard. We also hope to continue nurturing the development of other small schools.**

As a charter school, we are mandated to improve learning opportunities for all pupils with a special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low achieving. This is an area that we've been particularly successful. Historically we have attracted students who are particularly low and high achieving. We have had students who it appeared would never learn to read or write, yet ultimately they have reached grade level or above. We believe that the rich variety of artistic, interpersonal, and intellectual activity allows every child the opportunity for excellence in some area. We keep a collection of each student's work through the grades and never cease to be amazed by the content of these collections. **As state and national demands narrow in focus, we hope to continue to promote the value of seeing and working with students as individuals with unique educational needs and goals.**

We are a materials-based learning program. One of our assumptions is that students learn by interacting with materials and other people. Through this interaction, we know that students create their own meaning and understanding. They are curious and interested in figuring things out. It is the teacher's job to notice how each child interacts with materials, ask questions, and provide materials and instruction that lead to the next step. **Our goal is to provide learning opportunities that allow students to "uncover" material rather than "cover" it.**

While we have learned over time that much can be done with a limited site and minimal financial resources, we know an adequate site enhances our students' sense of identity. **To this end, we dream developing an environment that is both adequate in size and aesthetically pleasing. We are proud to say that we have been hugely successful, and continue to beautify the campus every year.**

Additionally, our racial and ethnic diversity has grown from our original 18% to our present 36%, but we believe that our school community would be enriched by even greater diversity. **Therefore, we are eager to recruit and serve a much greater population of Latino students.**

We believe that the conscious link that we make between assessment and instruction is largely responsible for our success. We pay careful attention to what students can do and what they are interested in doing. Based on our observations and interactions, we use our students' strengths and interests to create curriculum. Our annual assessment process includes three conferences, portfolios, and narratives. We have provided training to other educators by sponsoring conferences, offering workshops, teaching in credential programs, training student teachers, encouraging visitors, and consulting through grants. **We are committed to continuing outreach to other educators and providing training about alternative assessment and instruction.**

In their wisdom, our original steering committee established a Teachers Council whose domain is curriculum, students, and classroom issues. Teachers meet weekly to discuss curriculum, philosophy, policy, and student issues. As the people who know the most about the instructional needs of our students, teachers make curricular and assessment decisions using crucial input from parents, as well as information about best practices in education. They also have many opportunities to learn and create. Many serve in one or more administrative capacities. **We aspire to build a staff that is self-actualized as both human beings and professionals because we know that students benefit when teachers are empowered.**

SBCS teachers are devoted to the notion of shared power. We are called upon to educate our students to live in a democracy. This means that students must be involved in making decisions related to curriculum and classroom management. **It is especially important to us that education at SBCS be a process of living and participating in a democracy rather than preparation for living and participating in a democracy.**

Finally, as members of a democratic society, we deeply feel that it's our duty to promote social and educational reform. We are concerned that the present direction of education is dangerous and damaging. We foresee a generation of children who will be lost to "standards" and "standardized testing." We believe that a generation of children is being sacrificed to political whims and agendas as we "race to the top." **We aspire to keep the voice of dissent alive and serve as a reminder that every child deserves to realize his/her potential whether or not his/her needs and accomplishments can be measured and met in a conventional manner.**