

**SELF-STUDY VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**FOR**

**ELDORADO SCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED  
CHILD / EMERSON HONORS HIGH SCHOOL**

**4100 E. Walnut Ave.**

**Orange, CA 92869**

**March 22-25, 2009**

**Visiting Committee Members**

Ms. Barbara Al-Bayati  
Evaluator, University of California, Irvine (UCI) Center for Educational Partnerships (retired)

Dr. Stuart Bernstein  
Sr. Advisor, The Amber Group

Mr. Andrew Castanon  
Former Chair, Mathematics Department, Windward School

Dr. Thomas L. Hardin  
Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Mater Dei Catholic High School (Chula Vista, CA)

## **Introduction**

Founded in 1958, Eldorado School for the Gifted Child/Emerson Honors High School (Eldorado Emerson) is a private, non-profit, non-sectarian school. The school is located at 4100 E. Walnut in Orange, CA. The school's mission follows:

## **Mission**

Eldorado Emerson seeks to be a learning community that supports the special needs and talents of gifted and high ability students, honoring their unique set of learning and developmental characteristics. The school wants to promote each student's maximum potential in a culture founded on relationship and respect, providing students with educational, social, and artistic opportunities to develop into lifelong learners who value both intelligence and imagination.

## **Philosophy and Vision**

The philosophy and vision that flow from the mission statement result in a challenging, diverse, and safe learning environment. The school community understands that every learner is unique and that teachers should work with students as individuals engaged in a mutual journey of discovery and inquiry. A keystone of the Eldorado Emerson educational philosophy is to introduce students to what their minds are ready for, reducing anxiety and increasing love of learning as a natural outcome of their experiences. To that end, they believe strongly in supporting the whole person, providing a rigorous curriculum that stretches students beyond the "core" curriculum of language arts, math, science, and social studies to include non-traditional subjects such as the arts, music, and foreign language at every grade level.

Eldorado Emerson focuses on college preparation, guided by California State Standards and national standards for various subject matter, while honoring the interests and readiness levels of the students. The school stresses enriched and deep inquiry-based knowledge acquisition processes rather than voluminous amounts of output and product. By following an eleven-month school year, more days in each year are available to support learning and growth, as well as provide opportunities for special topics of interest. The high school honors curriculum is approved by the University of California system. While the school does not offer AP courses, teachers provide the opportunity for all students to take Advanced Placement exams through the tutoring program. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) has continuously accredited the school.

The school promotes healthy, balanced attitudes towards lifestyle choices, personal habits, and time management. Cooperation and responsible citizenship is encouraged at every level. Eldorado Emerson is a smoke-free, drug-free campus that appreciates differences and diversity, welcoming students of all races, creeds, cultures, and religious beliefs.

The first rule of Eldorado Emerson is to “take care of everything and everybody.” This vision is shared by a dedicated, experienced group of educators and support staff as well as an involved parent community all working together to foster literate, lifelong learners who can function effectively and contribute to a diverse, technological, and ever-changing democratic society.

## **Chapter I: Student/Community Profile**

Of the current enrollment of 195 students, 22 are preschoolers, 68 are in the elementary grades (K-6) and 105 are in the secondary grades (7-12). International students comprise approximately 60% of the secondary school providing a richly diverse environment.

The current student body is composed of 40% White, 41% Asian/Pacific Islander, 8% Hispanic, 2% African-American, and 9% other/mixed ethnicity.

The school serves a diverse socioeconomic base from the following cities: Fullerton, Brea, Placentia, Yorba Linda, Riverside, Chino, Chino Hills, Rancho Santa Margarita, Trabuco Canyon, Cerritos, Buena Park, Garden Grove, La Habra, Laguna Niguel, South Laguna, Newport Beach, Mission Viejo, Huntington Beach, Fountain Valley, Costa Mesa, Irvine, Tustin, Santa Ana, Anaheim, Anaheim Hills, Orange, Villa Park and surrounding areas. The annual cost per domestic student is approximately \$12,000; this figure is higher for international students. The school offers scholarships based on academic progress and/or financial need. There are 33 students who are currently on partial or full scholarships.

The school is located on five acres in the City of Orange. It contains special facilities for art, music, computers, foreign languages and the library, as well as general classrooms and a Performing Arts Center. Eldorado Emerson also has tennis and basketball courts, a field for soccer, baseball, field hockey, flag football and other sports.

### ***School Philosophy***

The school’s philosophy is to encourage a positive, supportive environment in which children learn in a variety of ways. It attends to children’s differing needs and learning styles to provide engaging and appropriate educational experiences. Originally founded as a school for the gifted child, the school’s mission has expanded to include high ability and gifted children who are divergent thinkers, many of whom have difficulty getting their needs met within a more traditional environment. Distinctive characteristics consistent with the school philosophy and mission are:

- Average class size of 15
- Many opportunities for student-centered learning and inquiry based activities
- Whole person curriculum, maintaining intellectual and emotional balance through inclusion of foreign language, music, and art instruction at every grade level

- Instruction that meets students at their level, differentiated to suit their ability (example: math pool allowing children to progress according to their developmental readiness and mathematical abilities, rather than by a prescribed grade level assignment)
- Focus on relationship between teacher and student in fostering an emotionally supportive environment, matching teacher style and class “personality” with teaching assignments

### **Student Performance**

All teachers evaluate students throughout the year. The school schedules semi-annual parent/teacher conferences in January and June. During these conferences the staff provides parents evaluations from all teachers who teach their child. Letter grades are not assigned to students below the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

The Stanford 10 Test is administered to all students from 1<sup>st</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grades in May of each year. Seniors are given a choice whether or not to take the test. All new seniors and international students (whose English is sufficient) are encouraged to take the exam.

**The attention to the individual person has consistently resulted in SAT 9 or 10 standardized test results that surpass the national average.**

Data support the fact that most of the upper elementary students who have been at Eldorado School for three or more years have achieved test results that are double or triple their chronological grade level. The data demonstrate the general trend for Eldorado students to maintain higher grade equivalency scores even without the “teach to the test” philosophy like many other schools.

In addition to standardized testing, alternative measures aligned with academic standards are used to gauge student performance. At the elementary levels, student portfolios are maintained with a standardized battery of assessments in language arts and in mathematics. At the secondary level, non-standardized assessment includes tests and quizzes, oral presentations, projects, essay writing, periodic work samples, laboratory write-ups, and rubrics. Feedback is given to each student regarding his/her performance, particularly as it pertains to presentations, projects, and essays. In addition, in cases where teachers use informal anecdotal records, they are performed on a scheduled basis so that each student is being observed in the learning process throughout the year.

### **Emerson High School College Preparation Results:**

Designed for the gifted adolescent, this unique school takes pride in educating the minds of tomorrow’s leaders. Each year all students study art, music, computers and foreign languages along with all college preparation courses. High school courses are UC approved, and honors classes are offered when appropriate. AP

courses are not offered, but students may elect to work independently and take AP tests.

## **Chapter II: Progress Report**

Major changes and follow-up progress since the last Self-study were based on the 2006 Visiting Committee Report. Thus, the faculty and staff at Eldorado Emerson have continued to address the committee's recommendation in the following five ways: professional development opportunities for teachers; leadership opportunities for staff; school-wide systematic assessment programs; development of the discipline committee; and promotion of the ESLRs.

The school's action plan has accomplished each of the critical areas of follow-up, including the impact on student learning.

Based on the 2006 Visiting Committee Report, the faculty and staff at Eldorado Emerson have worked to accomplish each of the critical areas for follow-up, including the impact on student learning. Those three critical areas of post-2006 follow-up are: technology, curriculum mapping and multi-grade level mentoring.

The follow-up area in Technology has eleven new items of equipment that will enhance student learning, both in the classroom and throughout the campus.

Regrettably, curriculum mapping has been discontinued.

Multi-Grade Level Mentoring is a positive way to get and keep all students involved in a supportive peer level learning environment.

## **Chapter III: Self-study Process**

Eldorado Emerson School provides a positive, non-competitive environment to nurture students' personal and educational growth. The school offers a well-rounded education including core academic classes, and classes in foreign language, physical education, music and the arts. Far and above most other schools, Eldorado Emerson fully operationalizes a student-centered ideal.

With regard to the Eldorado Emerson School Self-study, the 2006-2009 process was comprehensive, collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders. All teachers, staff members, parents, and K-12 students were invited to participate in the data gathering and compilation of various sections of the report as appropriate.

To clarify the school's purpose and the expected school-wide learning results, between Summer 2006 and March 2009, the school's Leadership Team reviewed the 2006 Visiting Committee report and implemented regular meetings and inservices among stakeholders in order to identify areas of strength and areas needing work, while seeking to integrate the school's ESLRs with its mission and vision.

To assess the actual school program and its impact on student learning with respect to the criteria and the expected schoolwide learning results, by summer 2007, a newly constituted Leadership Committee discussed ESLRs and the school's goals for the 2007-2008 school year. The focus was to intentionally integrate ESLRs with curriculum-based standards via continuous weekly meetings throughout the remainder of this timeline, including issues related to faculty, discipline, standards based curriculum, school culture and support of student learning.

In developing a schoolwide action plan, the Leadership Committee reported at monthly staff meetings to review and discuss the recommendations of the previous Visiting Committee. A product of these discussions was the development of the next steps for implementation of professional development, leadership opportunities for staff, and review of ESLRs and school goals in order to integrate ESLRs with curriculum-based standards.

Between fall 2007 and publication of the Self-study, in order to develop and implement an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishments of the plan, there were regular staff meetings, focus group sessions, and planning by stakeholders to address the ESLRs, state standards, and assessment issues. The Leadership Committee prepared and presented a drafted Self-study and action plan to staff and stakeholders, then revised and published the Self-study incorporating staff input.

## **Chapter IV: Quality of the School's Program**

### **CATEGORY A. ORGANIZATION FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

The Eldorado Emerson faculty and staff have seven Self-study findings that promote and/or expand their organization for student learning. They are: the school purpose, school governance, school leadership, staff, school environment, reporting student progress, and school improvement process. Based on the Self-study findings, the above items appear organized, competent and rational.

The school's purposes are as follows: to exceed the California State Standards in all subjects, to develop well-rounded students and academic excellence in all basic academic fields, including the fine arts (music, art, drama), athletics and computer science, to inspire, to prepare, and to graduate confident and responsible adults who have developed a framework of knowledge and skills as a foundation for a life of learning, to provide a sheltered place for those students who are bright and sensitive beyond their age levels, protecting them while they gain strength and maturity, to graduate students who exhibit intelligent and creative approaches to problem solving and decision-making and to develop students who, upon graduation, should be able to attend their colleges of choice and achieve success.

## **Areas of Strength for Organization for Student Learning Category:**

### **Areas of Strength:**

- The school staff is in the process of evaluating attendance and grading software to modernize record-keeping and administrative duties and believes it will be able to fully implement a system by the end of the year.
- Parents and students, in a survey, expressed their beliefs that the curriculum is meaningful, challenging, and engaging.
- Parents and students surveyed confirmed that the school's curricular expectations exceed what is taught, on the average, in other California schools.
- It is apparent that the school's curriculum is balanced and strongly addresses the whole child resulting in significant learning gains.

### **Areas for Growth:**

- Continued improvement of the school's financial resources in a clearly defined master plan is a key issue.
- Levels in the ESL program need to be more defined and consistent. The school's schedule needs to support students who possess limited English skills; students should be grouped by their skills and abilities. In addition, some of the ESL classes are too large to be consistent with the school's philosophy of maintaining small student-teacher ratios.
- More infusion of study skills into the school's curriculum would benefit students.
- Continued consistency is needed in articulation of the curriculum and expectations of student achievement.
- Continued and more focused monthly curriculum meetings for both the lower and upper divisions at Eldorado Emerson are necessary.

**Evidence:**

- Interviews with parents and students stressed an appreciation for teachers who are concerned with their students' personal and academic development and statements from teachers, administrators, and support regarding their own willingness to provide counseling, tutoring, and personalized compassionate care.
- Portfolios and examples of academic work displayed at the Academic Fair are examples of a high level of success.
- A high percentage of graduating seniors go on to college.
- Visitors observe a school environment where learning is clearly taking place.
- Presently, there is no finished master plan for school improvement, especially with regard to increasing financial resources through marketing and development, for technology, and facilities, although the school has begun work on two of these.

**A2. Governance Criterion**

With regard to governance, the governing authority adopts policies, which are consistent with the school purpose, and supports the achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results for the school.

A board of directors that sets policies, decides important issues, grants scholarships, and protects the integrity of the school and its resources governs the school. The board's encouragement guides the teachers, staff and students to embrace the school and its philosophy.

**A3. School Leadership Criterion**

The school leadership makes decisions to facilitate actions that focus the energies of the school on student achievement of the expected schoolwide learning results.

The school leadership empowers the staff and encourages commitment, participation and shared accountability for student learning.

The leadership hierarchy is as follows: the board of directors includes the school director/founder, leadership committee, department chairpersons, teachers, other staff members, Promethean Society student leaders and the students .

#### **A4. Staff Criterion**

The school leadership and staff are qualified for their assigned responsibilities, are committed to the school's purpose and do engage in ongoing professional development that promotes student learning.

The school has 24 full-time and 7 part-time teachers and staff. Many hold advanced degrees, including two with doctorates. Teachers at Eldorado Emerson come from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Four teachers graduated from high school and university in Asia or Europe. There are daily informal staff meetings at lunch and formal meetings weekly, including department meetings and leadership committee meetings. Teachers regularly consult one another for ideas and information.

Eldorado Emerson has resources in place for hiring and nurturing a well-qualified staff. On the school's official website, there is a link titled, "Employment," where potential teachers may apply to the school. A hiring committee typically interviews between five to seven candidates for each job. When Eldorado Emerson hires a new teacher, it is important to advise him/her on the school's philosophy. All staff members make a strong effort to welcome and support these teachers. This is also accomplished by making sure the new teacher has a mentor to turn to for advice and guidance. Teachers are encouraged to meet together during the lunch period, which helps new teachers feel connected, and allows for circulation of pertinent information.

The staff holds many upper level degrees, including bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees. The leadership team fully supports the professional growth of the staff, many of whom are in the process of earning a credential, masters, or doctorate.

The staff at Eldorado Emerson works closely together in an environment that stresses open communication. Regular meetings constantly enable the teachers to be fully informed of daily events. Teachers are able to discuss and consult each other for ideas and information, and to collaborate on many different projects that are taking place in their classrooms. The staff is highly educated and knowledgeable; the diverse education and backgrounds of each staff member creates a well-rounded approach to education.

Staff development at Eldorado Emerson is intended to strengthen teacher effectiveness and provides growth for educators, providing authentic learning opportunities that enhance student learning. As such, the school budget absorbs the cost of providing a substitute teacher when teachers are absent for staff development. In addition, P.A.L.S. (parents assistance league) provides funds to allow staff members to participate in personal development conferences. Many of the teachers have taken advantage of this opportunity.

Professional development workshops/conferences attended by Eldorado Emerson staff have recently included: BTSA (new teacher mentor program): monthly workshops, weekly meeting with participating new teacher and open discussions; CLAD Certification: classes focusing on ESL learners; ESL Workshop: Washington, D.C.,

Summer of 2007; Seminar on Adolescent Boys: California State University, Fullerton, CA; Conference on Value of Art for K-12 Students In Today's Society: Penn State University, State College, PA; Seminar on Anger Control Made Easy: Cross Country Education, Irvine, CA; Seminar on "Why We Worry?" Understanding and Treating Anxiety Disorders, Institute for Brain Potential, Anaheim, CA; ESL Teaching (with IEP), July 2006; Orff Music Workshop, June 2004; Arts Are Core, April 2007; Utah Festival Opera, class training, July 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007; Spalding Language Arts 1, June 2004; Spalding Language Arts 2, July 2005; College Board Counselors Workshop, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA 2007; American Physiological Society Workshop, San Diego, CA 2008; NAFTA Annual Congress, May 2008; Second Language Acquisition Workshop, January 2007; National Montessori Convention, November 2007 & 2008; Workshop called Intensive with Music under Professor Richard Barent, November 2008; Workshop called Intensive with Music under Professor Lisa Nallus, Ongoing; Workshop called Extended Education Class on Life Science, August 2007; Microsoft Office User Specialist Program, Santiago Canyon College, 2004; Photoshop CS2 Class, 2008; Workshop entitled Discipline With Dignity, October 2003; Columbia University Satellite Writer's Workshop, 2003-Current; Yearbook Summer Camp at CSUF, August 2008

#### **A5. School Environment Criterion**

The school has a safe, healthy, nurturing environment that reflects the school's purpose. The school environment is definitely characterized by a respect for differences. There is a trust and caring, professional support and high expectations for each student.

Campus safety receives a high priority at Eldorado Emerson. The school is a gated campus with six secure gates. Younger students have daycare access before and after school. For the safety and well-being of the students, there is adult supervision for both younger and older students in the daycare and high school grounds. During school hours, all visitors are required to enter the office for approval to enter the school. This school holds required fire regulations, including periodic fire drills and has fire extinguishers and earthquake kits in each classroom.

There is always a staff medical doctor on campus and other adults who can provide first aid and CPR. The office has medications for minor injuries and provides medical assistance. Precautions are taken to ensure the campus stays healthy through prevention and careful screening of the staff and students. This is a drug-free, smoke-free campus.

#### **Student and Parent Survey Results**

Satisfaction surveys were conducted during the spring of 2007 and the fall of 2008. Students were given surveys to complete during their homeroom class time. The parent survey was mailed home to all parents from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The students completed most of the surveys, while parents returned approximately 100 surveys. In both surveys, the student and teacher relationship was determined to be

the most significant reason for attending Eldorado Emerson.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of parents strongly agreed or agreed that their children are receiving a fundamental core curriculum.

Eighty percent (80%) of parents strongly agreed or agreed that their children are learning subjects in more depth than is typical in the California school system.

Ninety-eight percent (98%) *strongly agree or agree* that the school successfully instills a love of learning in the students. (See Figure 5)

Ninety-five percent (95%) of parents strongly agree that the quality of the instruction is excellent or good while only five percent (5%) indicated that the instruction was average.

Seventy-four percent (74%) of students declared those students from all cultures, etc. are friends on equal basis at Emerson. Seven out of ten high school students plan on completing their education at Emerson. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of students plan on attending a four-year university after graduation.

#### **A6. Reporting Student Progress Criterion**

The school leadership and staff regularly assess student progress and the school leadership, as well as report overall student progress to the remainder of the school community.

For the elementary level, student progress is monitored by checking daily work and quizzes as needed. Teachers keep a portfolio for each student with examples of their work throughout the term so that progress can be identified and problem areas may be addressed. Student progress is assessed using the California State Standards as a baseline, with emphasis on meeting each student at his or her appropriate level. Parents and guardians are informed with monthly or weekly newsletters. In keeping with an open-door policy, teachers informally meet and discuss student progress anytime necessary, and on a regular basis.

During the year, the elementary staff sends home two midterm progress reports, and parent/teacher conferences are scheduled for each student at the end of each term. Conferences include evaluations from each teacher who works with a student, and parents leave the meetings with a complete picture of their students' progress and future goals.

At the secondary level, teachers regularly administer quizzes and tests; this is combined with daily evaluation of homework and schoolwork. Teachers use midterms and finals to assess cumulative learning. Teachers send midterm progress reports and end-of-term grades to each parent or guardian each semester. Formal parent/teacher conferences are held at the end of each term, and informal meetings in person and/or over the phone are conducted, as needed, to keep guardians and parents aware of

progress. Open houses, back-to-school night, and other school activities provide time for parents and teachers to communicate and allow parents to see their children's work. The school administers the Stanford Achievement Test, the PSAT, and AP tests on campus, and they are mailed away for machine scoring. These test results are forwarded to parents and guardians.

#### **A7. School Improvement Process Criterion**

School leadership facilitates school improvement, has school community support and involvement, effectively guides the work of the school, and provides for accountability through monitoring of the schoolwide action plan.

### **CATEGORY B. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

#### **B1. What Students Learn Criterion**

The school provides a challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum for each student in two ways: effective communicators and lifelong learners, and critical thinkers and problem solvers.

##### **Effective communicators and lifelong learners:**

- ❖ Oral communication is from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade where students gain oral communication skills through theater, class presentations, speeches, debates, singing, reciting poetry, and graduation speeches.
- ❖ Listening includes a balance of quiet listening time, as well as opportunity for interaction between students, and students and faculty.
- ❖ Reading and literature involve instilling a desire for students to learn to read, understand, and analyze various genres, including nonfiction, fiction, and poetry from different parts of the world. Students read in small groups with teachers to better meet individual student's reading needs as they also use a variety of comprehensive strategies and techniques.
- ❖ Writing and composition: Teaching cursive begins in kindergarten since the belief is that the ability to write is essential in the thinking process. Narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive are the four modes of writing taught. Students learn the MLA style while, on average, writing bi-weekly essays which stress clarity, structure, composition and revision.
- ❖ Grammar is introduced and taught from the first grade throughout junior high school. At the high school level, review and the proper use of grammar is taught. The parts of speech are learned, and through writing, all students become

accustomed to all grammatical rules. Grammar is also gleaned through the learning of foreign languages.

- ❖ Spelling is taught on a regular basis from the first through fifth grade. At the secondary level students check misspelled words through “spell-check” on the computer.
- ❖ Science and technology are taught from the first grade through high school. Topics and subjects are general science, biology, chemistry, astronomy, earth science, human anatomy, physics, robotics, and the history of science.
- ❖ Mathematics courses follow the California State Standards. All students achieve an understanding of their appropriate level of math; not just their current grade level. From kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, students learn all the basics of arithmetic; from 7<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup>, students learn the concepts of variables, exponents, ratios, advanced graphing, angles, shapes, quantified measurement of space, trigonometric functions, derivatives, and integration. Throughout, all students learn mathematical vocabulary terms, definitions and proofs, problem solving techniques and analytical skills.
- ❖ Social Studies begins at the primary level with students learning about their community, world relationships, world traditions, the global environment, and current events. Students predict, analyze, and synthesize up-to-date current events and use the internet for current events, research papers, and projects. Two research papers in MLA style are required per year at the high school level.
- ❖ Computer use is multidisciplinary with reference to standards including those within the categories of the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for students and faculty. Students learn to touch type, use word processing and spreadsheet software, to incorporate digital photography, involving the use of digital cameras, scanners, and editing software such as PhotoShop.
- ❖ Art is effectively communicating ideas in a visual project via verbal forms. Visual arts are included in the entire K-12 curriculum. The complete fine arts program provides a balance in the highly academic curriculum that is particularly important in the development of the whole person.
- ❖ Music is available for all K-12 students in singing and/or the playing of a musical instrument. Students use the philosophies of Orff-Schulwerk Kodaly and Delcroze as they develop into creative self-sufficient musicians. They are expected to be able to compose, improvise, read, write interact and develop ideas with others, play a multitude of instruments, and sing with good vocal technique. Students perform using Orff instrumentalism, recorders, movement and speech, and are encouraged to develop a life-long appreciation and enjoyment of music.
- ❖ Physical Education is much more than “gym class.” It is the study and practice of the science and the art of human movement from the early basics of learning and performing everyday motor skills to the higher level of learning and participating

in the formal sports of soccer, field hockey, flag football, basketball, softball, and track and field.

- ❖ ESL (English as a Second Language) is an important component of the curriculum since many students come from other countries, many with limited, if any, English reading, writing, or speaking knowledge. Students are exposed to grammar in preparation for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), which is necessary for entering college.
- ❖ Foreign Languages begin at the elementary level where students learn colors, numbers, and songs in Spanish or French. At the high school level, students may continue study in either Spanish, French or begin Arabic or Japanese. Students learn grammar, conversation, reading, and writing while also demonstrating and developing a love of the language by sharing presentations, projects, foods, and performances.

**Critical thinking and problem solving are in the areas of:**

- ❖ Mathematics - where skills are learned through the development of symbols, understanding quantities, changing those quantities, application of mathematical rules and the application of logic to reach a conclusion. Elementary students are introduced to work problems in kindergarten, along with telling time, its value, the quantities of money and descriptive measurements. Junior and high school students follow the California State Standards including basic college preparatory courses. The hierarchy of classes includes; Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus. All students attend a mathematics class each year in which all students are taught how math may be used to solve problems in everyday life. In higher-level courses students identify the importance of math in engineering, statistics, business, science, and industry.
- ❖ Social Studies - Teachers use lectures, discussions, and the question/answer techniques to develop conceptual thinking and problem solving skills. All courses promote logical thinking through comparative analysis, induction and the development and testing of hypotheses. Social studies also fosters freedom of self-expression and the ability to think critically allowing students to evaluate information to distinguish bias and point of view.
- ❖ Science - develops conceptual thinking and problem solving. Students also learn to use standard laboratory equipment and proper laboratory safety rules. Essential skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, and mathematical/spatial skills are applied in each science course.
- ❖ English - at all levels teaches students to read, understand an author's message, absorb the richness of meaning, and analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form. Class discussions and lectures promote critical thinking skills and problem solving. Students develop a wide-ranging vocabulary, how to speak and write in a logically organized way, and to use specific strategies of coherence as repetition, transitions, and emphasis to enhance the organization of their writing.

Teacher and peer evaluations aid in the process of revision and analysis. Students learn to demonstrate an effective use of rhetoric, how literary meaning is shaped by social and historical contexts and how to think critically, and to learn to recognize, interpret, and evaluate how authors construct themes through narrative techniques, resources of language, and literary and rhetorical devices.

## **B2. How Students Learn Criterion**

There are NINE WAYS at Eldorado Emerson Private School that are related to HOW students learn. The most important part of HOW for the faculty and staff at Eldorado Emerson is all about RELATIONSHIPS.

The Language Arts, Science, Math, Social Studies, Foreign Language, Art and ESL Departments emphasize the use of 2-D and 3-D projects to make the curriculum more enjoyable, relevant, and accessible. In Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science video tapes and DVD's are used throughout the year to visually enhance learning. In the sciences, laboratory experiments are conducted to help the students visualize and comprehend the subject matter. In the Language Arts Department, the disciplines of drama, creative writing, speech, debate, and poetry are used to enhance student interest.

Small Class Size is another boon as to HOW students learn. On average, the teacher-student ratio is 15:1. These small classes allow each student to actively take part in learning through oral presentations and manipulative games the teacher is able to facilitate. Teachers also have the opportunity to speed up or slow down their lessons depending on individual or group needs. Small classes also provide the opportunity, especially with the younger ones, to introduce them to new observations and ideas as well as activities such as field trips to the tide pools, the planetarium, zoo or even a nature walk at different times of the year in and around the school. Finally, smaller classes permit teachers to organize special learning activities for all K-12 students.

Technology and Computer instruction begins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade when students learn keyboard skills, word processing, and applications such as Excel, Word, and PowerPoint, and computer basics. All students are encouraged to use their increasing computer skills in all of their class activities and assignments.

More specifically, the elementary students have classroom computers for educational games and the learning of basic computer skills. The secondary students learn how to research using the Internet, word processing and how to create PowerPoint presentations. Also, the computer lab and the classrooms use high speed cable for Internet connections.

Art classes are a K-12 important element of the curriculum. The art room is fully equipped with an abundance of materials, tools, and a kiln for baking pottery. The art faculty is highly trained and offers opportunities for all students to learn both about artists world-wide and throughout history, as well as the history of art and architecture. Students are actively engaged in numerous art projects from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>

grade throughout the school year, and all exhibit their work during Open House and at other special school activity days.

Music at Eldorado Emerson is derived from all world cultures, genres, and countries from the time of ancient civilizations to the present. Students develop and acquire musical skills by experiencing the elements of music based on the instinctual ways children learn and experience the world, by singing, chanting, and moving. Music classes provide a meaningful learning environment by allowing students to freely express themselves in a creative way through improvisation and composition that allows the student to demonstrate their full mastery of concepts.

### **B3. How Assessment is Used Criterion**

HOW assessment is used is a four part process.

Teachers are first. They are constantly assessing students through a number of strategies both informally and formally. In K-5, teachers use reading, writing, student portfolios, pre-tests, post-tests, and school projects to assess student growth and achievement.

In the upper grades, teachers implement many of these tools as well, but also use student participation in plays, oral presentations, art projects, PowerPoint presentations, and Science Fair experiments as additional forms of assessment. Goals are then established for each individual student to both support and challenge them. The school philosophy allows teachers to give specialized learning experiences to all students.

Semi-annual parent-teacher conferences are second. These begin with children in Kindergarten and continue through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade. At the elementary level, no letter grade is given; however, progress is assessed based upon classroom work, exercises, and participation. Teachers give the parents both oral and written evaluations.

At the secondary level, students receive letter grades in addition to the written evaluations from those teachers. At the end of the school year, a second parent-teacher conference is held for all students, K-12, and the results of the annual Sanford Achievement Tests are given to the parents.

Standardized tests are the third way of HOW assessment is used. From 1<sup>st</sup> Grade through 11<sup>th</sup> Grade, Eldorado Emerson School has used the Stanford 10 Achievement Test. Also, the juniors take the PSAT and the NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test), and the seniors take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test).

Performance is the final way of assessing student progress. The above test results indicate Eldorado Emerson students are above both the national and California average.

For example, in 2008, the Eldorado SAT Verbal score was 567; California was 499 and the nation was 502. In Math, Eldorado was 643, California was 516, and the nation was 515. The Written score for Eldorado was 579, California was 498 and the nation was 494.

### **Areas of Strength for Curriculum and Instruction**

Personal interviewing and observations attest to a strong commitment on the part of the faculty to help each student succeed.

Visitations to classrooms indicated that teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to measure student learning.

Students in interviews underscored the willingness of teachers to assist students outside of class time.

### **Critical Issues for Curriculum and Instruction**

1. More frequent and detailed analyses of data to identify specific students' needs, adjust instructional practices, and incorporate new and more effective assessments need to be implemented.
2. The board and administration ought to develop staff professional growth plans predicated on determined needs that can have a positive impact on student attainment of schoolwide goals.

### **Important evidence about student learning from the Self-study and the visit that supports these strengths and key issues include the following:**

- The Self-study indicated the school is very much aware that its unique strength of caring has afforded their students in many ways, through the close relationships and trust of staff members, as well as maintaining close, caring relationships with students themselves.
- Meeting with parents and stakeholders confirmed the close relationships that characterize the school community at Eldorado Emerson. The Visiting Committee was impressed by the numerous anecdotes offered by adults attesting to the personalized instruction and counseling provided by the school's staff.
- Meeting with the school's director and board illuminated the process of decision-making at the school. In addition, the Visiting Committee was introduced to a member of the board who possesses the expertise to lead the school's efforts in satisfying the critical need of resource development.
- The student interviews were enlightening. Two interviews were conducted: one with an elementary grade group and the other with a group of secondary students. In each case, students were effusive in their praise of their teachers

and the school. The factors that they considered most important were adult respect for and caring about individuals, adults willingness to work with students after school and the love of learning instilled in them.

## C. SUPPORT FOR STUDENT PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GROWTH

### C1. Student Connectedness Criterion

**Student Connectedness** The director's weekly meetings with staff members and impromptu sessions with students keep the communication among the Eldorado Emerson family flowing and current. Each student is given the opportunity to individually connect with his or her teachers. Small class sizes enable teachers to guide each student based upon the student's personal strengths. When needs are discovered, individually tailored programs are implemented, providing students the opportunity to face challenges and overcome academic obstacles.

It is easy to observe the bond between students and teachers on campus everyday. Teachers are greeted by former students and are often personally called upon for help and assistance when life circumstances warrant such aid.

A class known as Teen Talk encourages students to discuss topics affecting their generation today. Topics included safety on the Internet, communication between teens and parents, peer pressure, health, stress management and studying strategies. This class will be offered next in summer of 2009.

Interviews with students indicate they experience hands-on learning allowing teachers and students to engage in three-dimensional learning and to put textbook knowledge into practice, when lesson plans go beyond the pages of the book and into the hands of the students. For example, a math teacher tests catapults built by his students and hosts a robot-building contest. Another Eldorado Emerson teacher recently organized a replica of a medieval feast to help teach *The Canterbury Tales*. Staff and elementary students were invited to join the festivities complete with costumes, food, music and medieval atmosphere.

A teacher also had his English class students, when they were reading Franklin's *Autobiography*, learn about the famous American and become "him" for a day. Each student dressed in costume and visited an elementary classroom to teach young students about the iconic inventor. In addition, after reading and studying Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, students recreated this classic tale by putting on various productions—from puppet shows to musicals—for each elementary classroom. In this way, teachers and students are able to take learning to the next level and share it with the rest of the school. All students have the opportunity to share tangible examples of what they are learning in their classrooms.

The Monet Garden, built by students, functions to unify the student body, parents and staff in many ways, offering the chance for everyone to work together to create an

outdoor masterpiece. Twice a year, on “Garden Day,” parents, teachers, and older students help younger students plant flowers and share in the promise to look after our Earth, an important part of Eldorado Emerson’s philosophy. Science classes use the garden as an opportunity to learn about various plant specimens and their scientific names, and younger students go beyond state standards when they witness the growth and maintenance of plants and flowers mere steps away from their classroom. A pond is home to frogs, turtles and fish and is used to teach students about animals and their various habitats. Art classes take full advantage of this beautiful scenery, and students enjoy painting with watercolors in the garden during warm, sunny days. Parents can often be found sitting on benches scattered throughout the garden, enjoying the flowers and tranquility as they wait after school for their children.

Eldorado Emerson’s international students add further diversity to an already widely diversified school. ESL students are taught not only the English language, but American culture as well. Students participate in immersion courses and activities and quickly make friends with their American counterparts. The international students are included in many activities, often volunteering in elementary classrooms where they help with lessons and read to the children. An International Night celebrates students’ various backgrounds and promotes the school’s language courses. Students from Spanish, Arabic, French, and Japanese language classes dress in native attire, decorate booths, and sell native foods. They are able to earn money to support the purchase of various materials and trips for their classes. Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean international students also offer fare from their countries. The choral program also brings together students, staff, and parents through song and dance.

The elementary school has begun a mentoring program where older children help younger ones learn the words to songs, the proper way to walk on stage for concerts, and how to overcome stage fright. Children are also encouraged to discover how music unites people when high school students perform for them during Open House, Halloween, and Christmas. International students are introduced to new American songs and enjoy performing for their host families and fellow students. The annual talent show is also a great opportunity for students to connect through song and dance, and last year’s show featured stand up comics, singers, an Indian dance, and a Mozart extraordinaire.

In May of 2008, Eldorado Emerson held a “Run for Autism” event in honor of a staff member’s son who has the disorder. Organized by a teacher and a panel of international students; students and parents raised \$10,000 for the Los Angeles chapter of the Autism Society of America. This was the largest single donation the charity had received to date. Everyone united for a common cause, and the entire Eldorado Emerson family promoted the idea. Local businesses donated time and money as well.

The 2008 Summer Olympics provided a wonderful opportunity to join the elementary grades, combining students from K-4<sup>th</sup> grades into continents in order to compete in the school’s own Olympic Games, with relay races, obstacle courses and a Frisbee throw.

Field trips and assemblies also help to connect students to a specific topic they are discussing and studying in class. Trips to museums, farms, and historical sites help familiarize students with subject matter they learn about in class. Assemblies, which feature speakers such as a holocaust survivor, bring to life important narratives that enrich students and staff.

## **C2. Parent/Community Involvement Criterion**

Eldorado Emerson cultivates strong relationships with students' families, working together to create a successful school environment. The Parent Assistance League (PALS) is made up of parents motivated and determined to keep the school running smoothly and efficiently. PALS organizes many fundraising events throughout the year and has contributed money to fund a new playground, classroom equipment, updated computers, and a new sound system in the auditorium. PALS has also contributed to the Monet Garden, the school library and individual classrooms with donated money, services, and time.

Two open houses are provided each year, one in the fall (which is a Native Food Feast) and one in the spring. Both of these days give families and staff an opportunity to come together and celebrate what students have accomplished thus far. The music department puts on a performance and classrooms are visited. Everyone brings special dishes related to their family's ethnic background and culture.

Weekly and monthly newsletters, both from teachers and the front office staff, along with a new state-of-the-art website, help to keep parents informed of classroom and school wide activities. A friendly, family-like atmosphere allows parents to come in any time during school hours and get questions and concerns addressed and answered. Parents volunteer in the classrooms, donating time and talents to the school's academic programs.

Eldorado Emerson staff, students, and parents state that they function as a team, united by a common mission and inspired by past successes and motivated to continue making a difference in the lives of all of students.

### **Areas of Strength for Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth Category**

- Improvements to the Parent Assistance League (PALS) functioning include the following: a staff member has been appointed as a PALS representative; an annual welcome reception is hosted every September; PALS projects are outlined and volunteers sought for various duties; new brochures were created for prospective parents; PALS sponsored membership in the City of Orange Chamber of Commerce to help publicize the school.

- There have been many new programs and clubs added to the school's extracurricular offerings, including a mentoring program in which high school students team up with elementary students and an after school tutoring program that meets five days a week. Also, besides being tutored by teachers, parents, and students, foreign students and interested older students read regularly with younger ones to encourage values, mentoring skills, English practice and volunteerism. After school classes and activities have been added such as: Pilates class, weight training class, writing class, a Red Cross Club, a High School Drawing Club, a school-wide drama production, and a school musical written, directed and produced in-house for the school's 50th anniversary. In addition, the school has included more curriculum-based field trips and overnight activities, such as "Stargazing Night."

### **Areas of Need:**

Student and parent interviews underscored the need for an expansion of after school activities. Suggestions from these groups included interscholastic athletics, debate competitions, increased drama/musical productions, school newspaper and other such activities.

Although the school is presently wired for Internet use, the need for a more progressive and current instructional technology (IT) program was garnered from meetings with staff and parent stakeholder. Goals for the immediate future should include, but not be limited to, obtaining an IT expert familiar with educational needs of teachers and students. In addition, a reasonable expectation would be that each classroom would contain a computer for each student. The depth of the current curriculum enjoyed by students would be greatly enhanced by these additions.

Areas that need to be addressed to ensure quality education for all students include after school activities, expanded instructional technology and more specific data regarding student achievement.

### **Evidence**

Interviews with parents and students, staff, and the Self-study

## **D. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **D1-2. Resources Criterion and Resource Planning**

Eldorado Emerson is an independent private school, and as such, does not receive any state or federal funding. Resource decisions are made by the director in consultation with the board and leadership committee. Resources are used to support the school wide learning results. Allocation decisions are also based on enrollment demographics.

Student tuition and fees, and revenue generated by the Parent Assistance League (PALS) provide the funding necessary to carry out the functions of the school. The additional funding from PALS goes directly to teachers. It allows the staff to choose class specific materials and equipment.

Eldorado Emerson's annual budget is dependent upon our student enrollment. The director and the school's bookkeeper keep track of ongoing revenue and expenses. The school board serves a strictly advisory role regarding all budgetary decisions. All final decisions are made by the school director.

Eldorado Emerson has made a conscientious effort to maintain and upgrade its facilities. The school has a contract with a landscaping company to maintain its athletic field and sprinkling system. A pest control service comes out monthly to check for gophers on the big field and playground areas. A maintenance staff (two employees) cleans the classrooms and storage rooms daily and makes necessary repairs for safety as needed. The school is also in the process of creating a more visible office sign, obtaining quotes to paint the gates and wood paneling, and updating the school sign to reflect their newly adopted name "Eldorado Emerson"

This year, Eldorado Emerson purchased new textbooks for most grade levels. All textbook and instructional materials are first approved by the director and the administration before they are purchased. In high school, books designed for three levels of English language learners were chosen to support the school's International students. The elementary grade teachers chose materials and manipulatives to enhance learning in English, math, and social studies.

Eldorado Emerson has in place adequate procedures for attracting well-qualified teachers and other school staff members. They advertise in a local newspaper and have an "employment opportunities" link on the school website. PALS provides funding to support teacher professional development opportunities such as seminars, workshops, and conferences. Monthly staff meetings give all teachers the chance to raise specific issues, to be informed of current school initiatives and to prepare for upcoming school activities.

Eldorado Emerson issues surveys to the students and parents to gather input about their school experience. The school surveys the websites of other competing schools to compare activities, tuition rates, and general school information. Monthly staff meetings are used to solicit ideas regarding future planning. Parents have the opportunity to attend PALS meetings once a month and also may discuss resource funding. Individual conferences are held once a week between each teacher and the director. One reason for these meetings is to provide another opportunity for teacher input.

To support the implementation of the developmental program, Eldorado Emerson hired an outside firm to redesign the school's website. The school also runs monthly ads in two local educational magazines. Eldorado Emerson has folders for prospective families, which contain contact information, history, current classes, tuition, and

enrollment forms for the school.

**Areas of Strength:**

- The establishment of PALS provides added support for teachers' professional growth and various school programs.
- Experienced leadership and community involvement help to insure that the school's financial planning is realistic and supports the ideals and traditions of the school.
- The school's new and expanding website is a solid start to improving alumni connectedness and community presence.

**Key Issues:**

- Develop a more detailed budget including a breakdown of individual programs. Does the school have a tentative budget for 2009-2010? What about past deficits and school savings?
- Investigate competing schools to help design strategies to recruit more domestic high school students.
- Consider developing new programs that improve local community awareness.
- Ensure that there are adequate financial resources to offer competitive salary and benefits to attract and retain well-qualified teachers and staff members.
- The school board should create a board subcommittee to investigate the feasibility of starting a development program.

**Part B: Synthesize the strengths and key issues from all categories into schoolwide strengths and schoolwide critical areas for follow-up.**

**Schoolwide Areas of Strength**

1. An administration and staff that are committed to the ideals upon which the school was founded.
2. A staff and administration that work collaboratively with each other. This approach enhances the academic program and fosters a warm and caring school community.
3. A student body that is talented, caring and supportive of the school community.
4. A student community that excels in its achievement and its serious commitment to learning.
5. Parents who actively appreciate and support the philosophy of the school and its staff.

**Schoolwide Critical Areas for Follow-Up**

In order that the school will be able to preserve its philosophy and school environment, the school needs to maintain its intimate setting. However, the school needs to prepare action plans to market Eldorado Emerson, increase its resources to fund programs, improve facilities and retain teachers and staff.

- 1. The school leadership's collaboration with the school board and other stakeholders create and put into action marketing strategies that attract more domestic students to the school.
- 2. The school leadership needs to adopt a more systematic and forward-looking budgeting process that supports long term planning toward retention of school staff.
- 3. The school leadership in collaboration with the school board develops and implements new programs that ensure that the school has the necessary financial resources to carry out the schoolwide action plan.

**Chapter V: Ongoing School Improvement**

The school's Leadership Committee has already begun devising action plans that address each of the critical needs. Persons responsible will be all stakeholders.

### **Schoolwide Action Plan #1 – Increase Resources**

In order to preserve our philosophy and school environment, we need to keep our intimate setting. However, we also need to increase our resources to fund programs, improve facilities and retain teachers and staff.

March 2009 – Meet with selected board members to appoint a development chairperson. This individual will begin to network among professional associates, parents, alumni and community in order to obtain funding to increase teacher salaries, create an endowment to fund scholarships, modernize facilities, and increase technology.

March 2009 -- Resource persons who should be cultivated by Eldorado Emerson are administrators, staff, board members, web designer, marketing specialists, public relations expert, alumni, and community officials

### **Schoolwide Action Plan #2 – Retain Teachers and Staff**

March 2009 – Review teacher and staff salaries and benefits in comparison with other schools.

### **Schoolwide Action Plan #3 – Market Eldorado Emerson**

- ◆ September 2008 – Re-design and update website to enhance school profile.
- ◆ January 2009 – Begin partnership with Waldorf High School for after school sports program.
- ◆ January 2009 – Participate in local math competitions.
- ◆ March 2009 – Begin partnership with Orange Christian School for after school basketball games.
- ◆ March 2009 – Utilize a PR specialist to create press releases on an on-going basis to help publicize and market our school.
- ◆ May 2009 – Host public officials at our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.
- ◆ May 2009 – Publish college acceptance list in local newspapers and website.
- ◆ Spring 2009 – Hire professional photographer to take photos of our existing students for use in print advertisements.
- ◆ Summer 2009 – Begin to contact local elementary and middle schools to develop feeder schools.
- ◆ Summer 2009 – Appoint staff member to attend various high school fairs and visiting community events to publicize our school.

- ◆ Summer 2009 – Create a debating class that will instill necessary skills for formation of an Emerson debate team to begin September 2009.
- ◆ Research and implement various programs (sports, arts, academic, social networking) to publicize our high school program throughout the community.
- ◆ Continue advertising geared to domestic students.

**Existing factors that will support school improvement:**

- An experienced and dedicated school leader, Leadership Committee, and board.
- A faculty that has a genuine desire to be supportive of students and the school community
- Excellent communication and discussion of the action plan to the school community resulting in widespread support.

**Impediments to school improvement:**

- The school must insure that there are sufficient funds to carry out the action plan.
- The school has only limited athletic and other extra curricular programs, therefore the recruitment of domestic students is more difficult.

**Soundness of follow-up process to monitor accomplishment of schoolwide action plan:**

There is sufficient input from all stakeholders, and the monitoring of the action plans will largely be the responsibility of the administration and Leadership Committee. Plans to communicate progress to all stakeholders are in place.

**Assessing Progress:**

Monitor prospective parent inquiries to determine if the school's profile has risen in the community; the analysis will include records of donations and resources. In addition, numbers of applicants will be screened to determine which factors of marketing were most successful. This data will be reviewed on a monthly basis and quarterly analysis will determine if changes in action are necessary.