

California STAR and Natomas Charter School – Part 1

Because of the state's increasing emphasis on standards and mandated testing, Natomas Charter School (NCS) will be publishing a series of articles over the next few months on the California STAR Program and the role it plays in NCS's accountability status as a charter school.

Winter is melting into spring and before you know it, our students will be faced again with the annual onslaught of state tests. In May 2003, NCS, along with all other public schools in the state of California, will be participating in the sixth year of the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. Authorized in 1997, the STAR Program has steadily been driving curriculum and assessment in all California public schools – including public charter schools - for over five years.

The STAR Program includes 3 Testing Components:

- The California Standards Test (CST)
- A nationally Normed Reference Test (NRT)*
- Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE) **

The standardized testing portions of STAR typically takes place over four school days. Students are given test questions in various core subject areas in both the CST and the NRT. As more curricular standards have been developed and implemented, the California Standards Test (CST) is steadily growing larger and longer, and less emphasis is being placed on the norm-referenced test (NRT). Student test results are sent to the school in August and parents are notified of their child's results by mail.

But what does all this testing really mean to the students? Some see the tests as a challenge and strive to do their best. Others, however, approach the yearly tests with apathy and put little or no effort into them.

Despite differing views about the tests, STAR does have great meaning for the school – including this one. Love it or hate it, STAR is the only common measuring stick this state has for assessing student, and indeed, school performance on state curricular standards.

This is even more significant because Natomas Charter School (like most all charter schools) is constantly under state and public scrutiny. The public and

the government expects us to meet all state standards because we have so much flexibility with curricular design and delivery.

Thus, although the STAR Program was intended to provide students with *individual* test results and information on his/her progress on state standards, the *cumulative* student performance on these tests has a significant impact on the charter school (and perhaps the charter school movement) overall.

Indeed, as more and more restrictions are being placed upon charter schools, demonstration that we can perform as well as (if not better than) traditional public schools helps all charter schools maintain the flexibility to offer alternative educational approaches.

For more detailed information on the STAR Program and how to read your child's STAR Test results, please go to the California Department of Education Website:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/star/resources/2002report.html>

Next issue: California STAR and the API

** From 1998 –2002 the NRT was the SAT 9. Starting in 2003 NRT will be the CAT 6.*

*** Only given to Spanish-speaking students who have been enrolled in California public schools less than 12 months*

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