

Mendocino Unified School District
Press Release: March 23, 2005

The MUSD Futures Committee, with due consideration to declining enrollment and many of the other pressures on education in general and this District in particular, has completed three significant tasks.

The first was to strongly confirm Mendocino Unified's shared vision for vibrant, student-centered programs at each level K-12. We strongly recommend the maintenance of a comprehensive, college-preparatory high school program which includes alternatives such as the Community School, the more traditional High School and an independent study option. We believe that middle grade students be involved in an active program, designed to meet their diverse academic needs, and believe that this program should also offer project-based learning and multiple opportunities to interact with peers, with younger students, and with high school and community members. Our vision for primary and intermediate age students is that the foundational work of those grades should be undertaken with a clear focus on the whole child; these students need both challenging academic work and an environment rich in projects which address their creativity, their physical development and their need for many older student role models. We recommend that the underlying work of creating a learning community that binds rather than isolates campuses, staff, age groups, and our communities, be strongly supported by the Board.

Our second recommendation grew directly from our desire to unify rather than fragment and is a response to the smaller size of the District. We recommend that the District move from three main campuses to two, rather than maintain all three school sites which historically grew as the District grew. We suggested melding two of those campuses into a new program.

Given that second recommendation, members, parents and several students visited other Districts to see existing programs in operation. The visits included two K-8 programs - one newly formed and one of long-standing - and one 7-12 program, all in District's of approximately our size and with some similarities such as bussing or rural setting. All these programs are flourishing in their respective communities and each has made adaptations to a general model which is tailored to their specific program and their communities' needs and resources. The committee then discussed those two configurations at some length. Each has many positive aspects. As a diverse and experienced membership, we were able to bring a good deal of personal professional experience to the discussion.

Based on that work, the committee now recommends that the District move toward creating a K-8 program and continue its 9-12 program. We believe this option provides the best opportunity to enhance the creativity, leadership potential, and social growth of all the students but perhaps especially those "in the middle". We believe that we can create a program which will give students many opportunities for same age grouping, with special privileges, activities, and responsibilities for each grouping. We see a K-8 program as able to continue embracing many of the positive aspects of a Middle School program and to extend the benefits of the more personal teacher-student connections of the elementary grades. We are excited by the prospect of blending these two strong programs; we are aware that there are also challenges which can only be met by developing closer ties between the K-8 and the 9-12 programs.