



PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE IN GRADE LEVELS OFFERED AT LTCS 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR - PERMANENT ADDITION OF 8TH GRADE CLASS

Historical Data:

The La Tierra Community School charter states La Tierra is a K-8 public charter. The original intent of the school was to thoughtfully grow into a full K-8 school. La Tierra had previously attempted to add both 7th and 8th grade in the 2014-2015 school year. At that time the enrollment was open to any student in the 7th or 8th grade who wanted to join LT. Unfortunately, many students who were having challenges at other schools and had behavior issues joined our community which created an unsafe and unpleasant learning environment. The 7th and 8th grade class was terminated at the end of FY15. Since that time there have been several discussions regarding fulfilling our charter by growing into K-8 thoughtfully and intentionally. The decision was made to grow into a K-7 for the 2020-21 school year. For the 2022-23 school year the 7th grade class became a stand alone classroom.

Challenges:

The greatest challenge comes with a combined classroom led by one teacher. This is being addressed by sharing instruction for the 3 middle school grades between the 2 primary teachers so they can focus on specialized instruction in their areas of expertise. Additionally, a classroom aide would provide academic support in the combined classroom.

Proposed Change:

Add an 8th grade program to La Tierra's grade configuration. The 8th grade class would be a combined class serving 7th and 8th together for the 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. For the 2026-27 school year the 8th grade would become a stand alone classroom.

Rationale:

1. Evaluating our competition and their grade configurations we see the disadvantage created by serving a Kindergarten through 7th grade configuration. Prescott Unified School District which is by far the largest school in our area

changed their configuration several years ago which has created a natural transition for students wishing to enter a district school when they are entering either the 5th grade, 7th grade or 9th grade levels.

Breakdown of local schools and grades served:

SCHOOL	GRADE LEVELS SERVED
PUSD Elementary - various	Kindergarten through 4th
PUSD Early Middle - Granite Mountain	5th and 6th Grade
PUSD Middle School - Mile High Middle	7th and 8th Grade
Skyview School	Kindergarten through 8th Grade (6th grade is stand alone and 7/8 is a combined classroom)
Willow Creek Charter	Kindergarten through 8th Grade (Combined 7/8 classroom)
Mountain Oak	Kindergarten through 5th Grade (changed this year previous they served to 8th grade)

2. From a SEL standpoint research shows that middle school is a time of major social and emotional growth. Due to our strong SEL foundations and teachings our students do not experience peer pressure and bullying which is common in other middle school settings. Both Conscious Discipline and EL learning have strong foundations in self awareness and ownership of actions which is critical during middle school as students work towards developing a sense of pride in accomplishments and an awareness of their challenges. Studies supported by safesupportivelearning.ed.gov point to the importance of aligning SEL practices between elementary and middle school to provide the highest level of support to middle school students. As our students have already developed many social and emotional competencies throughout elementary school, having a middle school able to provide them with increasing skills and helping to strengthen their foundation in SEL will better equip them to be able to face the challenges of their teen years and beyond.
3. Finally, parents who contact our school for potential enrollment frequently inquire as to our grade level configuration and express a desire for continuation through 8th grade.

Logistics:

Academic:

In moving forward with the addition of an 8th grade to our academic program it is vital for us to comprehensively plan to meet the academic needs of our students while preparing them for their transition to high school. Currently our stand alone 6th and 7th grade classrooms are structured as elementary school classrooms. All 6th and 7th grade students receive their core academic instruction from their crew teacher. In order to provide the most appropriate and rigorous program for our students while accommodating an 8th grade we believe sharing the instruction of all three grades should be split among two core teachers and an instructional aide in the combined classroom.

Our teachers will be able to specialize in the subjects of math/science and English Language Arts(ELA)/Social studies. Each class will begin the day with their crew leader. The sixth grade crew will participate in morning crew followed by their ELA and social studies block while the seventh grade will begin the day with their morning crew and math/science block. After lunch the students will switch classes and teachers. To provide adequate planning and collaborative time each class will participate in one specials class per day after lunch allowing the classroom teachers time to plan and monitor student progress collaboratively on a regular basis. To provide continuity and accommodate the additional instructional minutes required for grades 6, 7, and 8 there will not be a scheduled morning snack/recess. The 6th and 7th/8th grade classes will be provided this break as it fits in their morning plans.

We have begun to dedicate intentional time to planning the academic curriculum that will be presented in grades 6, 7, and 8. Math classes will continue to be taught using the EngageNY Math curriculum, which was adopted and is used by all classes school wide. In ELA students will participate in two book studies, one during the fall semester and a second during the spring. Along with these book studies grammar and writing standards will be met through the Writing and Rhetoric program and supplemented with ArgoPrep. 7th and 8th grade ELA standards make a significant shift to literature, the use of these programs and book studies will support this shift. Each class will continue to participate in one learning expedition each semester and will trade between a social student based expedition and science based expedition. In social studies, the sixth grade will continue their focus on Story of the World with the addition of a look at maps, and human/economic connection to the Earth. Seventh and eighth grade will have a strong geography focus, with seventh grade taking a look at geology and eighth grade study of political geography. In science classes, the sixth grade crew will study biomes while the seventh and eighth grade crews will alternate between the study of cells and the

systems of the human body and natural disasters. To help meet many 6th, 7th, and 8th grade standards we will focus on implementing science lab work in all classes.

Students will continue to participate in school wide presentations of their learning including student led conferences and portfolio presentations. These presentations will be designed to accommodate both the larger class sizes as well as additional student ownership and responsibility of learning.

Teachers will regularly incorporate the use of rubrics to communicate student progress with students and their families. In alignment with the K-5 classrooms, report cards will be shared twice per school year, once at the end of the first semester in December and once at the end of the school year in May.

Facilities:

One of the biggest obstacles to adding the 8th grade class is our current facility. The addition of 8th grade will require Art and STEM classes to once again be a mobile class. Please see Attachment A for a diagram of classroom locations for the 2023-2024 school year if 8th grade is added.

Financial:

- As the 8th grade class will be combined with the 7th grade class there will not be a need for an additional grade level teacher at this time. As discussed in the Academic section of logistics, we will need a classroom aide to assist with instructional support in the combined classroom. A full time classroom aide has an annual associated salary cost of approximately \$23,450. plus an additional cost of approximately \$7,500 for benefits.
- As the middle school classes will be utilizing technology frequently during the day they will require 1:1 technology in those classrooms. Using an estimate of 42 students and estimating a Chromebook cost of \$250 we would see an associated technology cost of \$10,500.
- The current middle school classroom teachers would require 2 weeks of additional work time over the 2023 summer to adequately prepare academics to support the 6th-8th grade class. The cost associated with a 2 week stipend for 2 teachers would be approximately \$4,450.
- Additional costs would be related to increased science equipment needs. The goal would be to support most costs associated with science needs with Donors Choose, Grants or other sources of funding.

A survey of current 6th and 7th grade students was conducted with the following findings:

	Current 6th grade	Current 7th grade
Returning regardless	5	n/a
Returning if there is 8th grade	11	9
Leaving regardless	1	n/a
Leaving if there is an 8th grade	0	n/a
Undecided	3	n/a

Utilizing the above survey results we have the following enrollment projections:

Current	2023-2024 (K-7)	2023-2024 (K-8)
K-11	K-18	K - 18
1-21	1 - 10	1 - 10
2-22	2 - 21	2 - 21
3-23	3 -22	3 - 22
4-13	4 -22	4 - 22
5-13	5 - 13	5 - 13
6-20	6- 14	6 - 14
<u>7-9</u>	<u>7th-8</u>	<u>7/8 - 28</u>
127	119	139

Kristy will have a budget projection utilizing the above information available by the end of the weekend and will be provided as an attachment as soon as it is available.