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Alder Grove Charter School

Our mission is to provide students with personalized learning and to support parental choice in education.

January 17, 2012

Dear Alder Grove Charter School families,

Charter schools are able to operate with more flexibility and freedom than traditional public schools, but are held to a higher level of academic accountability. In California, accountability of all schools is measured by the Academic Performance Index (API) a number derived from school data, mainly results of the annual STAR test taken by all 2nd through 11th grade students each spring. **Alder Grove's ability to stay open depends heavily on these test scores.** Although, we know that there are many other important skills and talents your children are developing, we are required to make advances each year on STAR test scores. Recent legislation gives more stringent academic requirements and makes it easier for charter schools who don't meet minimum API standards to be closed.

Our staff, School Leadership Team and Governance Council continues to discuss ways to improve student learning. One of the things we will be doing this year is encouraging every student to complete a test practice booklet prior to testing. It is our hope that completing these booklets will help students develop general test taking skills as well as increase student learning. Please incorporate these materials into your weekly routine.

Within the next two weeks, your teachers will be distributing appropriate test practice booklets for all students in grades 2 through 8. As you spend time with your child (ren) using these materials, we encourage you to make notes on standards that are difficult and ask your teacher to review the content with your child (ren). We also offer a math lab on Mondays and Wednesdays at the 5th and M site from 1:00 to 2:00 where you can come and have a math teacher explain a difficult concept to you and your student(s). **Please return the completed, corrected practice booklets to Debbie at the 5th and M office.** Students who complete these practice books will receive a small reward.

Another great source for test practice is the California Department of Education's Released Test Questions. These are questions from tests that have been used in the past. Reviewing these questions with your student(s) is a great way to increase student learning and review standards. These questions can be found at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/css05rtq.asp>

Certainly one of the biggest changes affecting staff and parents over the last ten years is the high stakes testing environment that public education in general, and charter schools especially are facing. It is our intention as a school to honor parent choice while following all state and federal mandates and to ensure that each child meet minimum academic requirements while also having the time and resources to explore other areas of personal interest. We value and encourage the development of skills in science, social studies, art, music, dance, critical thinking and creativity, among others, although these subjects are rarely or not tested at all as part of the STAR test program.

All students will take a math and language arts test and students in grades 4 and 7 will write an essay (March 6, 2012) while 5th and 8th graders will have science and 8th graders only will have social studies as part of the annual spring STAR testing. Please talk to your teacher or call the office if you have any questions, concerns or ideas about the testing process at Alder Grove Charter School.

Thanks to all of you for your continued support of our school.

Sincerely,
Jenni Allen-SanGiovanni
School Director

Debbie Lammers,
Testing Coordinator