

**WASC Parent Committee and Survey Narrative  
Rancho Buena Vista High School  
November 2009**

Rancho Buena Vista High School's WASC Parent Committee was formed in March 2009, meeting together a total of six times over the course of eight months. After a number of extended discussions within our meetings and some significant conversations amongst our community and our stakeholders, it appears that there is a wide variance of perceptions about the school and its impact. These results clearly portray a "tale of two schools." Some parents think it's an excellent school, while others think it is not addressing the needs of their student. Perhaps, as one parent so aptly put it, "RBV—a school for everyone. It is a busy place, maybe too busy for some students!"

The WASC Parent Group has been a very diverse group, with many cultures and backgrounds represented. This reflects the makeup of the school, as well. Of the ten committee members, we have active parent volunteers, a faculty member with a child attending the school, a retired community member, a future RBV parent, a fluent Spanish speaker, and a university professor. Because of the group's diversity, we were able to gather a broad range of information and opinions from parents. This was done through personal contacts and through the use of an online survey that was also available in written form in both English and Spanish, giving all who desired the opportunity to express their views.

While most parents expressed a certain degree of satisfaction with RBV overall, there were areas where improvements need to be made, thus demonstrating a polarized view of the school. Out of 2600 families at our school, we had 311 survey responses. We were disappointed in the number of responses, but it wasn't for a lack of effort. We sent postcards to every family, school-to-home phone calls, and a comprehensive effort by the teachers to remind parents at Back to School night. Despite the lack of response, we feel that the survey results accurately reflect the opinions of the general parent population.

In preparing the survey questions, we identified four categories to be addressed: general/introductory trends, academics, communications, and school environment. For easier access, the group chose response options based on the level of agreement: Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, unless the answer required more specifics. There were three specific questions that required parents to give additional input. This gave parents an opportunity to reflect upon where their student currently is, where they would like them to be, and a space to write any reactions and recommendations they felt were pertinent to their individual student, but also relevant to process of examining the entire school's program.

## **Background Information**

The survey responses to this introductory section show that the majority of parents have students who are actively involved in one or more programs at school such as athletics, band, clubs, ASB, after-school enrichment classes, Gear-Up, visual and performing arts, internships, AVID and other programs. The highest participation reflected in the survey was 65% involved in athletic programs. Of those completing the survey, 75% feel involved in their child's education. As for preferred communication methods with the school, the majority favor technological communication such as email, school and teacher websites, and Parent Portal. Another 35% stated that they appreciate receiving information through the school newsletter, *The Longhorn Lines*. While a significant number of parents still appreciate receiving phone calls/voice mails, the majority of parents prefer the growing variety of ways teachers have been using to communicate with parents.

## **Academics**

In Academics, 90% of those surveyed agreed with or had no opinion that teachers were using a variety of instructional strategies. The majority believe that adequate tutoring opportunities are available. When asked about the methods of student evaluation, over 70% of those surveyed expressed satisfaction. One parent expressed their pleasure at the use of Parent Portal, "By having this available, my student was able to see what his grade was, if he was missing assignments and also have information on upcoming projects." There is concern that not enough teachers are using the ABI Gradebook, or even other on-line means to communicate student progress.

Also, the strong majority of those taking the survey are satisfied with the courses offered at RBV, but a number of parents would like to see more elective courses offered such as life skills, technology, and driver's education. In one parent's words, "I feel a well-rounded school needs to address all students, even those who are thinking of entering a trade that is more hands on." No matter what the class, parents appreciate that "A small number of exceptional teachers are not intimidated by having students question/discuss/challenge what is being taught in a verbal manner." While this may be the case for our Honors classes and a number of our college prep classes, parents would like to see more focus on opportunities for the 'average' students, who seem to get lost in the shuffle between the struggling students and the IB/Honors students who get the extra attention. One parent respondent noted "Lots of opportunities for kids really excelling and kids who need help. Those in the middle just get shuffled along."

Although this doesn't fall under the academic area, parents voiced a concern that the dress code and cell phone policies are not consistently enforced. The areas in which parents feel RBV excels are varied. Many appreciate the IB/AP and Honors programs, athletics, teaching staff, support

services, academics, tutoring, counselors, and Gear-Up/AVID. Other areas noted for their excellence were the internship program, drama, band, art, and the Special Education program at RBV. Academic departments such as English, Language, Math and History departments appear to be strong. Two departments—PE/athletics and History were congratulated for their focus on different aspects of student learning: “The athletic department offers a strong discipline and moral code. Our student has gained self-confidence and likes the healthy lifestyle that is promoted from the coaching staff. History is another area where our student is engaged, not only on past history, but current events. Our student is aware that there is a world outside of his high school experience and the history program engages him this way.” Many individual teachers were mentioned as being great educators and helpful to students.

## **Communications**

In the “Communications” section, the majority of parents filling out the survey would like to receive email notices in place of phone calls or letters. We see a need for improvement in communication between parents and counselors, and this is currently being addressed with the purchase of a new on-line tool for parents and students called *Naviance*. Improved communication is strongly expected as families use this effective program. 65% of parents surveyed feel they have quick responses from teachers. However, we recognize that greater use of Parent Portal by teachers and parents could resolve the 20% who are dissatisfied. “Every teacher should use the Parent Portal and have a class website where homework assignments and other info can be found by students and their parents.” Again, parents are strongly requesting that all teachers use this program.

Satisfaction with communication between parents and the administration is lower than desired; the fear of punitive action towards the student may be a determining factor. Overall, administrators are generally viewed positively as “helpful” and “knowledgeable.” Parents also expressed a desire for more information about a student’s academic progress between progress reports, and more regular use of voice mail, as well as more staff with bilingual skills. Parents were very happy with the ConnectEd phone calls from the principal regarding safety issues at the school, upcoming events, and other helpful information. However, a few parents feel that this system is used too often. Some also seemed dissatisfied with the phone system and responses they receive when they are calling the school.

One area of dissatisfaction was the school website. Many early respondents mentioned the need for updating the information and including more current events at the school. With this survey having begun at the end of last school year, it reflects a previous perception that things were not as current as parents might have preferred. We have, however, seen a huge improvement this

year as the website is up to date and contains much more helpful information. Additional suggestions from the survey that need to be pursued included a question and answer link for parents and consideration for “A central information page that students and parents can go to for the various clubs, where and when they meet, and advisor/contact information.”

## **School Environment**

School pride, spirit, reputation and image are viewed as being important by a large majority of those completing the survey. Under this heading, the areas of most concern seem to be a lack of safe, clean bathrooms, and drugs and alcohol use on campus. Almost every survey completed expressed frustration at the inability to maintain clean, safe restrooms on campus. The lack of clean and safe restrooms is of greatest concern to parents. Perhaps, one parent expressed the concern of many parents and students when they wrote: “Bathrooms need to be more closely monitored. Both of my children refuse to use them because of gang activity, bullying, drug use in the bathrooms, and being unsanitary.”

Other concerns noted were peer pressure, academic pressure and a lack of motivation among students. One third of the respondents are concerned about social bullying on campus. There were many suggestions that pointed to the need to reduce the overcrowding on our campus. “The school has too many students so there aren’t enough resources.” It is expected that the opening of the new Mission Vista High School in the district next summer will ease some of the load on our campus. Another possible solution to the overcrowding came from a parent: “Hold students and parents accountable for attendance, grades, etc.; if attendance/truancy continue to be problematic and they have an intradistrict transfer, possibly revoking the transfer.” Parents also desire more healthy food options at lunch, and shorter lines. Again, this is a symptom of the high population of our school.

While there are concerns that are strongly expressed about the environment and experiences at RBV, the majority of parents who completed the survey seemed to be happy with the school and faculty. Many teachers were recognized individually as excellent educators and that there are some excellent programs at RBV. Improvements in communication and safety seem to be the most difficult problems facing the school. Parents don’t seem concerned as much about physical safety as the need for bathrooms available where students are not subjected to smoky environments or threats to leave by bullying students.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, Rancho Buena Vista High School has some wonderful programs to engage students in the educational process. The faculty, staff and student body are constantly working at honoring our motto to "Respect the Ranch." While we struggle with the problems associated with an overcrowded campus, we realize that families are choosing to attend RBV because of its outstanding programs and opportunities for educational growth.

We appreciate the input collected from parents through this process and look forward to finding solutions. Although we acknowledge that there are definite areas to be improved, the overall opinion is that RBV provides a learning environment to help students succeed now and in the future. Despite the challenges facing the largest high school in San Diego County, one parent wrote, "I am constantly amazed at the high caliber of the classes offered to students. Further, I am pleased with the additional help my student has received in regards to help with assignments, tests, college preparation and more. The teachers seem to go above and beyond their duties to make sure our students excel."