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# Lamorinda Schools

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## PTA Fieldtrip

### Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs Goes To Sacramento; Beyond The Budgetary Crisis, Our Schools Need Fundamental Reform

By Sophie Braccini



(left to right) Diane Oshima and Cindy Millard, co-chairs of the Legislative Advocacy Team of the Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs

On the 2005 National Assessment of Education Progress, California ranked 7th lowest in eighth grade math among the 50 states, 3rd lowest in reading, and 2nd lowest in science... The low achievement of California's students will almost certainly hurt their economic outcomes later in life." These

severe statements are part of the "Getting Down to Facts" study ("GDF"), a comprehensive research study ordered by a bi-partisan group in Sacramento. The investigation was conducted by researchers at Stanford University, with a mission to examine California's school governance and finance systems. On February

27th, the Las Trampas Creek Council of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) will go to Sacramento to meet with policy makers and ask them what actions they intend to take after reviewing the report.

Now in its twenty-eighth year, this "Advocacy Day" will include PTAs and Parents Clubs from Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda and Walnut Creek school districts, joining forces with San Ramon Valley, Alameda and Livermore. The day trip brings up to 200 parents, educators, district staff and board members to the place where decisions are made.

"It is important that a large group of voters from our area remind our elected officials that they are watched," explains Cindy Millard, co-chair with Diane Oshima, of the Legislative Advocacy Team that is part of the Las

Trampas Creek Council of PTAs, "We expect them to take action."

The grim budget that was proposed by the Governor and its cut for education will be at the center stage as well. "With the looming budget crisis and the huge potential cuts to Lamorinda school district budgets next year, we will address the need to protect Proposition 98 funding, as well as addressing school reform," says Oshima.

Jim Negri, Superintendent of the Acalanes High School District, believes that this trip is a very effective way to engage in a dialogue with policy makers. "The Governor is telling us that there won't be any revenue enhancement to balance the State deficit and that we'll have to deal with the cuts," says Negri, "but the impact will be on the students. So we won't lose track of the long term issues, but we have

to communicate on the crisis we're facing."

The Las Trampas Group is presenting the Governor with a letter that highlights the priority actions as it has identified them: equalization funding, giving districts more local control, increasing the predictability of funding and fully funding special education. "Equalization is the key to more just and better funding," explains Oshima, "the funding of our schools is based on a per student allowance. The amount of money that districts receive per student varies immensely, from \$450 to more than \$1000." The system was established in the 70's when our district was rural. Since then, demographics have changed considerably all over California but the system has not. Reforming it, will take years," states Oshima, "but all too often elected officials do

not want to dig into such a complex issues and would rather sponsor short term measures."

"Going to Sacramento is about Citizenship," insists Millard, in unison with the GDF study that concludes: "The failure to act now abrogates our public responsibility. Ultimately we fail our children, our families and the future of our State."

All concerned members of the community are encouraged to participate; the dead line to register for the trip is February 15th. Go to <http://www.lastrampaspta.org/08AdvocacyDay.pdf>

To learn more about the GDF study go to:

<http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/summary-paper-final.pdf>

## The Young Queens and Kings of Chess

By Jean Follmer



Sara Saba & Colby Suppinger play chess

Photo Jean Follmer

Lamorinda is home to a growing number of young chess players, both girls and boys alike. The presence of The Berkeley Chess School in our communities has made chess more accessible to new players. Active in more than 150 schools in the Bay Area, The Berkeley Chess School was founded by Elizabeth Shaughnessy in 1982. At the time, Elizabeth agreed to teach chess voluntarily in the Berkeley schools. To her amazement, over 80 girls and boys attended the first session. As a former Irish women's chess champion, Elizabeth understood the value of making chess available to children and to girls in particular. Elizabeth says "We do quite an amount of girls' stuff. Chess is a man's world and there's no reason that it should be." The School offers eight regional chess tournaments, including two all-girls' tournaments each year.

The benefits of playing chess have become increasingly well known. The School teaches "critical thinking, problem solving, how to deal with winning and losing, and other skills which af-

fect learning in the classroom." Similar to learning a language, chess skills are more easily acquired in childhood. Shaughnessy said they "teach how the pieces move in one lesson with kids," but it takes 6-8 lessons for adults to learn it. The School offers classes to kindergartners and up, but feels the kindergartener who is ready for chess is a "rare child." This is due to the level of concentration required in play and time in school makes 1st grade and beyond a natural entry point for most children.

Lafayette resident Sonia Shiri enrolled her daughter, Sara Saba, in chess camp last summer. Although disappointed that Sara was the only girl, she was pleased that Sara chose to continue. Dr. Shiri says chess is "a good fit for Sara...she's a very curious kind of child and loves board games." Shiri says chess "offers another dimension of quiet concentration to plan, execute and see the consequences of what they did." Sara, a Springhill 2nd grader says she likes "that you have to think a lot to do it...the planning and trapping...the whole part of it." Shiri contacted The Berkeley Chess

School to establish an after-school chess program at Springhill. She says, "I thought it would be great to have it here, on site." The Springhill program has a current enrollment of 18 students, four of them girls. Shiri says it "helps to have a girl in there. Having Sara here helped get other girls in." She hopes the program "will attract more girls by showing there are girls out there playing." Sara agrees, "It's pretty good to have girls around." The presence of both girls and boys brings balance to the class atmosphere. Shaughnessy says, "Girls like the sociability of it and boys don't at all. Girls tend to make friends with the person they played" and the boys "tend to make it very competitive."

The School's involvement with Lamorinda is long-standing. Shaughnessy mentions that Sam Shankland, a 16-year-old Orinda resident recently won the Falconer Award for being the highest ranked player under age 18. Sam studied with The Berkeley Chess School years ago at Glorietta Elementary. The Falconer Award is sponsored by Lafayette resident Niel Fal-

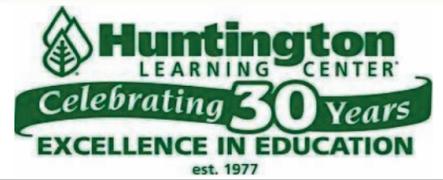
coner, a former senior chess champion of the United States.

The Berkeley Chess School offers classes in many of the public and private schools in Lamorinda. Classes are also regularly available at the community centers. Shaughnessy mentioned the School is always looking for monetary and voluntary contributions. She said "25% of the population gets reduced rates" for low-income, family discounts, etc. The School is also very involved with Title 1 schools throughout the Bay Area. For more information, please contact [www.berkeley-chessschool.org](http://www.berkeley-chessschool.org).

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