

OUSD—State of the District Looks Pretty Good

By Andrea A. Firth

About thirty interested parents, teachers, and administrators recently attended a special presentation by Superintendent Joe Jaconette on the state of the Orinda Union School District (OUSD). “We wanted to bring the interested parties together to reflect upon the successes and accomplishments of the District and to leave with a sense that things are going well,” stated Pat Rudebusch, President of the OUSD School Board.

Not surprisingly, Dr. Jaconette started the presentation off with a review of the District budget for the next school year, which remains balanced without staff layoffs despite a \$700K revenue shortfall due to the proposed State school budget cuts. “The bulk of our expenditures, about 89%, go to staff salaries and benefits,” explained Jaconette. “This creates a major challenge to reducing expenses without impacting people,” he added.

Jaconette stated that the District will be challenged to maintain financial stability and preserve ex-

isting programs in the future without increased revenues. “There is a parcel tax in Orinda which is already fully committed to ongoing expenditures,” he said. “Due to increasing costs and to consider growth, we have to consider increasing revenue through an additional parcel tax,” he added. To that end, a Parcel Tax Feasibility Planning Committee has been formed by the OUSD School Board to initiate discussions on the parcel tax process, which requires a year or more.

Declining enrollment was another factor impacting revenue in the District. A demographic study of enrollment, commissioned by the OUSD School Board, projected a small degree of declining enrollment in the short term with stable enrollment across the District for the foreseeable future. When asked by a parent in the audience about the impact of the two new residential developments in Orinda on school enrollment numbers, Jerry Bucci, the Director of Business Services, explained that the study forecasts

extend to 2018. “[According to the study] the two developments would yield about 100 students over a long period of time. We still have plenty of space to accommodate these students,” stated Bucci.

The presentation’s tone lightened as Jaconette moved to a review of the District’s academic progress. By several indicators, OUSD students were shown to be performing well above proficiency levels. “Our students are achieving,” stated Jaconette with a smile. He went on to describe the many programs to support and reinforce students’ reading and writing skills—a District-wide focus that had been established for the 2007-2008 school year. These programs included student writing workshops and professional development programs along with the addition of literary coaches and the enhancement of classroom libraries.

As far as technology, Jaconette reported that the District is up and running with a ubiquitous wireless network at all sites, an enhanced

phone network with improved emergency contact capabilities, and almost no network down time. In addition, a District-wide technology plan is under construction to develop strategies for technological growth and improvement.

Jaconette concluded the meeting noting his satisfaction with the District’s progress over the past school year. “I hope you recognize that this year has been impacted significantly by the budget crisis, and despite that, we have had a lot of activity, forward movement, and planning,” he stated. “We have met our main goals to keep programs intact and make some movement forward.”