

SCHOOL CALENDAR

School Governing Board Meetings

Acalanes Union High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2009 at 7:30
Location Change: The 2/18 meeting will be held at the Las Lomas High School Theater
Wednesday, March 4, 2009 at 7:30

Lafayette School District

LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 7:00
Wednesday, Feb. 25 at 4:00, the Board will hear public input on the budget process
(location: Stanley Auditorium)

Moraga School District

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, March 10 at 7:30

Orinda Union School District

OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, March 9 at 4:00



St. Perpetua Parish Salutes Scouting Sunday, Feb. 1, 2009: Cub Scouts, Brownies, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were encouraged to attend mass in uniform and participate in the service. The Scouts took on the roles of communion gift bearers, greeters and ushers. The adult leaders are, from left to right, Marianne Brent, Don Hinton, Eagle Scout Kaid Collins and Jim Cervantes. Photo submitted by Jim Cervantes

Restoring the Creeks at Del Rey Elementary

By Sophie Braccini



Mrs. Brasch's 4th grade class plants Santa Barbara sedge given by the Friends of the Orinda Creeks Photo Sophie Braccini

Kids frolicking in the creeks can be a pleasant and playful sight to see. When they are doing it for restoration purposes it is called environmental science, and in addition to having fun students are learning the rules of the natural world. On Tuesday, February 10th, all 4th and 5th grade students from Orinda's Del Rey Elementary School participated in a hands-on restoration project on a section of Moraga Creek bordering their school.

The project is part of a larger effort by the Friends of Orinda Creeks (FOC) and The Restoration

Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to offering community groups assistance in creek and wetland restoration projects, to restore the natural environment of the Orinda creeks.

Class after class, the children came down to the creek with their teachers. They were assigned a part of the riverbank and the mission to remove invasive plants (such as ivy) and replace it with native sedge or willows.

The groups were having fun pulling on the strong roots, despite that morning's biting cold. Once

most of the ivy was gone on their assigned patch, the team of biologists that came to assist dug small holes in the ground where children planted the new natives.

"This completely ties our 4th grade natural science curriculum," said 4th grade teacher Terri Brasch, "we study California land forms, rivers and creeks and we work on how to protect our environment." Brasch explained that in preparation for the workday they researched water shed and the importance of what is put in the land.

The children were aware of the impact of their work: "We are removing the non-native plants and replacing it with native plants," said 4th grader Kylie. When asked about the purpose of doing so, she added that this would bring back the local critters and attract more trout to the stream.

"This is exactly the purpose," confirmed John Zentner, a member of both organizations. "The rainbow trout is the big predator of this ecosystem, it feeds on smaller fish, mosquito larva, and bugs. This fish is important for the restoration of a balanced and healthy eco-system," he explained. Following the physical activity in the creek, Zentner gave information to the children about local creek flora, fauna and animals that rely on the healthy homeostasis of this habitat.

"When you talk about wildlife to children they usually picture the rain forest or Africa," said Zentner, "but this is wildlife in their midst, like a micro rain forest."

The restoration at Del Rey is part of a large project in which the FOC and the Restoration Trust have been involved for years. They identify parts of the creek that need restoration and work with residents to gain access.

"Working with the Orinda School District and Del Rey was really easy," said Zentner, "they were really supportive." Del Rey Principal Kirsten Theurer, who came to the creek to see the work in progress, agrees: "Our school integrates as much as possible its natural environment to enrich the learning experience."

Lamorinda Schools

Lamorinda Schools: What's on the Chopping Block?

Budgeting in Uncertain Times

By Andrea A. Firth

"This is the worst budget that I have seen in my 35-year career," stated Jim Negri, Superintendent of the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) at the last Governing Board meeting, which was attended by over 150 concerned parents, teachers, and students. "Every student, staff member, and family will be impacted. We will not be doing school as we have done it in the past," he explained one week later to another auditorium packed with concerned stakeholders attending a Special Meeting of the Board convened to solicit public comment.

"There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty," said Orinda Union School District (OUSD) Superintendent Joe Jaconette as he and the OUSD Board of Trustees listened to two hours of public comment on proposed program and personnel reductions at their February meeting.

"This is the worst case scenario. This is not where we want to go," declared Rick Schafer, Superintendent of the Moraga School District (MSD) as he reviewed the proposed list and prioritization of cuts planned for his district. Over 60 parents and teachers attended the Board meeting and discussed the budget problem and potential solutions into the late evening hours.

The long delay and lack of clear information regarding State education funding has put Lafayette School District (LAFSD), and districts across the state, in an untenable situation reported Superintendent Fred Brill in an communication to parents in anticipation of the upcoming LAFSD Governing Board meeting. Brill and the LAFSD Board have also scheduled a special meeting on February 25th (4 p.m. in the Stanley Auditorium) for additional public comment on the proposed budget.

School administrators across Lamorinda have spent countless hours over the past several weeks trying to set budget priorities for the 2009-2010 school year in the face of dramatic State funding cuts, the magnitude of which remained difficult to define. While answers from the State prove elusive, Superintendents from all from all four of the public school districts are planning for the worst. Lamorinda school districts will likely be spared

mid-year budget cuts due to prudent financial planning and reserves, however all four districts expect significant State funding shortfalls for the next school year. The three kindergarten through eighth grade districts estimate deficits approximating one million dollars, and the high school district faces a whopping \$5.2 million shortage. Declining enrollment in all three communities will contribute to the reduced State funding and represents \$1.3 million of AUHSD's budget gap.

Despite the many budget unknowns, districts are forced to make decisions regarding personnel cuts by March 15th in order to meet the legally mandated deadline to notice teachers and other certificated employees (e.g., librarians) who may be terminated. If the AUHSD were to act on their complete list of proposed budget reductions, the equivalent of 60 faculty members would lose jobs, and this does not include a number of classified employees, such as custodial and administrative staff, that are also on the cut list. All four districts hope that additional revenues will enable them to shorten their cut lists and save jobs. "This process is very stressful for the district's employees," states Schafer who also notes that his District faced personnel reductions last year too.

A Multi-Year Problem. The State education funding crisis could last through next year plus two more years—making it 2012 before school districts see the light at the end of a very dark tunnel. Districts will have to manage with the cuts that are made next school year plus a lower revenue stream. If the State economy continues to decline, further cuts will be likely unless offset by other revenue sources.

Schafer anticipates that he will recommend that the MSD Board utilize some District reserves to make up for the funding shortage this year. However, he plans to avoid the situation that several districts in California may face in the next two years when they are unable to pay their bills. The State will be forced to swoop in to salvage the bankrupted districts that will then lose local control of their budgets—a situation that Moraga parents, and other Lamorinda parents, would find unacceptable.

Raising Revenues. Lamor-

inda schools' budget woes are compounded by the fact that the districts are designated as low-wealth districts—an oxymoron that leaves them funded at lower levels as compared to other schools in the State. Identifying additional revenue sources has been part and "parcel" of the budget discussions. OUSD has a school parcel tax on the March 3rd ballot that could ameliorate their current budget problems. AUHSD is investigating the elements and timing of a new parcel tax. And, stakeholders have asked the MSD Board to begin to explore the idea of a new parcel tax for Moraga. Lafayette's school district passed their last parcel tax less than two years ago.

Districts are also thinking "out of the box" with respect to revenue generation. OUSD plans to consider allowing more interdistrict transfers, which could add up to \$110,000 to their bottom line. The high schools may consider increases to athletic fees and reconsider their ban on advertising in the athletic stadiums. Several parents asked about using volunteers to do the work of employees who might be terminated, however education and labor laws often prohibit this trade-off. All four districts expect to rely on their fundraising groups to help backfill their deficits.

Federal Stimulus Package. All Districts have their eyes on the federal stimulus package monies for education that could help to fund special education programs that have been historically underfunded by the feds. For example, MSD spends \$900K of their general fund monies on these programs. However, Districts are waiting to see how the legislation is structured to see if the funding is earmarked for the districts or siphoned off by the State before reaching the local level.

As budget discussions continued across the Districts, parents bemoaned the loss of programs that contribute the "complete and rounded student" such as Leadership at the high school and environmental education in grade school. They questioned how teachers will manage with increased class sizes and few to no aides to help. Employees and administration sought a common solution. However, there was little finger-pointing other than toward the State.

Lafayette Elementary Celebrates International Night

Submitted by Daniela Wolff



Photo Benedikt Wolff

On January 28, 2009, Lafayette Elementary School celebrated International Night with a Global Jam that highlighted the school's commitment to cultural awareness and ethnic heritage in our community. The school wide event, sponsored by the Lafayette PTA, was held in the school's multipurpose room and was attended by more than 200 students and their families.

This year's theme, Global Jam, included an international food potluck, arts and crafts of percussion instruments from around the globe, and necklaces celebrating the

Lunar New Year. Participants of International Night were also treated to an international showcase of local talent including: Eden Aoba Taiko Drummers, Lafayette Scottish Country Dancers and the Caribbean-Neo Folk performer, Asheba, who got all the children on stage with their percussion instruments for a real global musical jam. "This event is our chance to showcase the many cultures at our school and in our community," said Daniela Wolff, PTA co-chairperson for International Night.

Local merchants also made donations of food and gift certi-

icates in honor of the event: Trader Joe's, Mangia and Kopitiam Restaurants, The Handlebar and Powell's all contributed to the evening's festivities.

"The International Night committee, Lafayette PTA and our school are very dedicated to celebrating our student's cultural identity. We just add the arts and crafts, quality entertainment, and of course great food," Wolff added. International Night is an annual event held every January at Lafayette Elementary School.

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