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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I'm writing to express my profound disappointment with the Orinda School District for its apparent decision to eliminate the Environmental Education (aka the nature area) program at Wagner Ranch. This program is the heart and soul not only of Wagner but of the other three elementary schools in the district as well.

My son, now in 5th grade, has participated in this program since 3rd grade and this has been one of his most formative experiences at school. His understanding of and appreciation for nature, the environment, and other animals that share our world is far greater than his years would suggest because of the work and dedication of Toris Jaeger and the other staff at the nature area. This program has enabled him to feel that there was something special "for him" to connect with at Wagner. I always thought that the goal of the District was to provide that something for every child. My son is moving on to OIS next year so this is not about how this affects my family. I am deeply saddened to think that other children will not have the opportunity to experience what my son has been fortunate enough to experience.

The OUSD Board needs to listen to the people and the community they represent and work with concerned parents to find a way to save this program. I know that there is no "fat" anywhere in the system but the \$6 0,000 (which comes from parent donations, by the way) cost of the Environmental Education Program only represents less than 3/10 of 1% of the District's budget. Fund raising and minor adjustments to other programs could make this up if the Board made it a priority.

If something must be cut it would be far better to trim something that can be more easily reinstated when finances improve. To try to put the nature area Environmental Education Program back in place in the future without Toris Jaeger's passion and institutional knowledge will be like trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together. It will not be the same. At least provide Toris, who is nearing retirement age anyway, the opportunity to help put a restructuring plan in place and train her successors to carry on the program.

Sincerely,
Fred Smith
Orinda

Editor:

A week after the last performance, I continue to be awestruck by the unbelievable theater production of Disney's, Beauty and the Beast, put on by Campolindo High School's Music Department. It was a difficult ticket to get! Due to the history of "sterling" productions at Campolindo in past years, all of the tickets were sold out prior to the first night. That's eight shows and over 3600 tickets sold! Additionally, the cast and production crew ran two shows for local elementary schools to begin "whetting the appetite" of budding actors and actresses as they approach high school.

What made this production unbelievable? Well, first, the sets, the music, the talented performers; THE SHOW. It captured Disney's "vision." Beauty and the

Beast could have played in Walnut Creek or even San Francisco and had widespread audience appeal. What impressed me most was the opportunity for involvement and the efforts by many. Listen to these numbers: 95 student performers, in two separate casts, captivating the audience with their acting, singing and dancing; 42 student musicians artistically performing Beauty and the Beast's musical score; 34 student production assistants moving sets, directing spotlights and opening curtains; and 172 parents, siblings and friends of Campolindo students volunteering their hearts out to allow these students this wonderful opportunity. Planning started in March of 2008, costumes were being sewn last summer, tryouts and callbacks were conducted in October and sets were being built in early January. WOW!

Special recognition goes to the students who filled our imagination so capably about Belle's quest to not be "odd," the Beast's desire to love and be loved and Gaston's unfulfilled fantasy of marrying Belle. To Stacey Kikkawa, Dave Pinkham and the entire artistic and production staff, your time, your patience and vision to help "mold" these actors and musicians into such capable performers was truly appreciated. Lastly, who will forget the hours and hours and hours of time by the many volunteers to paint backgrounds, build sets, feed actors, move people, sell tickets, deliver fan mail, bake cookies, sew costumes, sell roses, seat people, paint faces, etc., etc. etc.? Thank you for a wonderful experience. Beauty and the Beast was BOFFO!

BRAVO! BRAVO! BRAVO!

Will Cogswell
Moraga

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