

SCHOOL CALENDAR

School Governing Board Meetings

Acalanes Union
High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2010 at 7:30 pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate
School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2010 at 7:30 pm

Lafayette School District
LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2010 at 7 pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, Feb. 8, 2010 at 4:00pm

Budget:
A tentative Board Meeting is scheduled on Feb. 17 and the superintendent's final budget recommendation will be given at the Special Board Meeting on Feb. 24. Please check the district website for further details: www.lafsd.k12.ca.us.

Budget:
In addition to its regular meetings, the OUSD School Board has scheduled two special budget study sessions: January 22 and February 17.

Kindergarten:
Registration will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 26, and Wednesday, Jan. 27, at the following times:
Burton Valley Elementary,
9:00 - 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Happy Valley Elementary,
8:30 - 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Lafayette Elementary,
9:00 - 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Springhill Elementary,
9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Kindergarten:
Registration for children entering Orinda public schools in August 2010 will be held February 1st-4th, from 9am-1pm, at each of the elementary schools (Del Rey, Glorietta, Sleepy Hollow, Wagner Ranch).

School Finance 101, Monday, January 25, 2010, 7:00 - 8:30 pm. Sponsored by the 32nd District PTA. Learn about looming cuts to our schools, why our local schools are receiving lower per-pupil funding than any other state in the nation, and why parents and the community are being asked to donate money for basic school services. Las Lomas High School Cafeteria, 1460 South Main Street, Walnut Creek. RSVP by 1/22: nmvandell@comcast.net.

A Superintendents' Forum, February 4th at 7:00 pm, is being hosted by the Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs, at Acalanes High School, in the small theater, 1212 Pleasant Hill Rd., Lafayette, CA. Our local superintendents from the Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda and Walnut Creek School Districts, and the Acalanes Union High School District, will discuss the budget crisis and its affect on their school districts. Bring your questions.

The 30th Annual PTA Advocacy Day, "California Schools in Crisis: Advocating for Solutions", (bus trip to Sacramento), will be held on February 17, sponsored by the Las Trampas Creek and San Ramon Valley Councils of PTAs. Join parents, teachers and superintendents, going to Sacramento to communicate with education experts and our Legislators about California's education crisis, catastrophic budget cuts to our schools, and to learn more about proposed education reform and budget reform, and what you can do. Buses depart at 7:15 a.m., and return by 4:30 p.m., from Lafayette (Our Saviors Lutheran Church, 1035 Carol Lane, Lafayette).



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AUHSD Faces \$4 Million in Education Cuts and Teacher Layoffs

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"The solution is not in Sacramento," stated Stockton in his comments to the Governing Board, "The answer really is in the community." The Governing Board voted unanimously to conduct a public opinion telephone survey to assess the community's willingness to support an additional parcel tax measure to support schools through the current economic crisis. The parcel tax measure, if pursued, will be for a short-term tax; the amount of the parcel tax is yet to be determined. The District is considering placing the parcel tax measure on the ballot in the May mail-in or June election.

A parcel tax to support the AUHSD has been in place for over 20 years. Measure A, a six-year \$189 parcel tax with a senior exemption, will sunset in July of 2010 due to the passage of measure G last November. Measure G is a renewal of the \$189 parcel tax, which still includes a senior exemption but has no sunset provision. The existing parcel tax generates about \$6.7 million annually and has been spent to prevent the elimination of teacher positions and increased class size, and to maintain college preparatory and advanced placement classes, electives, and student support services. To generate \$4 million in revenue to cover the projected deficit

would require a new parcel tax of \$110 to \$115.

Stockton and Learned remain pessimistic regarding the forecast for school funding going forward, noting that the State budget as proposed includes several policy reforms that will be difficult to enact quickly, if at all. Learned cited the example of contracting out services, which may save money but is currently not allowed by law. While the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) concurred that the \$19 billion State budget deficit figure is reasonable, the LAO does not believe that receipt of \$7 billion in federal relief is realistic, leaving the State likely to fall several billion short of the Governor's proposed revenue goals.

"Districts will get hammered in the middle of next year," stated Learned, noting that there will likely be more cuts to education funding if the State's revenue projections fall short. "It's really an \$8 million problem over the next two years," he added.

The AUHSD has planned a series of meetings on January 20th (7 a.m., noon, 4:30 p.m., 7 p.m.) and January 21st (7 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.) at the District offices near Acalanes High School to discuss the school funding situation with parents, teachers, and community members.

Lamorinda Schools

K-8 Districts Prepare for Budget Cuts

By Jean Follmer

Once again, the budget outlook is bleak for California's public schools; Superintendents and school boards across the three districts that serve Lamorinda's elementary and middle school students are taking a hard look at their budgets in an effort to determine from where further cuts might come.

Lafayette Superintendent Fred Brill presented his preliminary budget reduction process and timeline during the School Board meeting on January 13th. "Based on the information we received (from Sacramento) and based on our \$2.4 million structural deficit, my recommendation is that we reduce our budget for 2010/11 by \$1.2 million and again by another \$1.2 million in 2011/12," said Brill. "At the very minimum, we would have to reduce our budget by \$920,000 or we would have no ending balance. We have to look at this as a two-year plan," continued Brill.

Lafayette School Board Member Shayne Silva said, "We're

kind of between a rock and a hard place. I shudder to think about doing this all in one year."

Brill will be soliciting input during parent meetings at each school site; he started with Lafayette Elementary School on January 13th. "The parents were really engaged and asking great questions," said Brill. Brill will present the budget reduction plan at the February 10th Board Meeting. A tentative Board Meeting is scheduled on February 17th and the final recommendation will be given at the Special Board Meeting on February 24th.

Moraga Superintendent Rick Schafer said the Governor's 2010/11 budget is "full of smoke and mirrors." The budget presented by Governor Schwarzenegger assumes receipt of a \$6.9 billion payment by the federal government that Schafer doesn't believe will happen. At this point, Moraga is expecting to receive \$360,000 less from the State of California next

year, but he expects the shortfall to increase by the time the state actually passes its budget. "If the budget was as good as last year, we'd still have cuts," Schafer added.

Shafer said his district expects enrollment to decline next year. He hopes retiring teachers will help the district avoid some resulting layoffs. "When someone loses their job, it's not a nameless number on a data sheet; it's someone you know. We're a people business and, unfortunately, people are going to be affected," said Schafer. The Moraga School District is planning to spend between \$700,000 and \$800,000 in reserves and that will still leave the district with a \$500,000 budget reduction. "We'll use reserves over a 3-year period, so it will be an ongoing reduction," said Schafer.

The outlook is similar in Orinda. "We are projecting at this time in Orinda that there will be a \$678,000 shortfall in 2010/11," said

Director of Business Services Jerry Bucci. That represents a "\$1,325 per student funding reduction from what the district should receive by statute," said Orinda Superintendent Joe Jaconette in a written statement on January 14th. "In the past two years OUSD suffered more than \$2 million in revenue limit reductions. Cuts to the revenue limit or annual per-student finding-are particularly difficult because it represents our largest source of 'on going' general operating funds," continued Jaconette. The Orinda district also expects that the state budget will change by the time it's actually adopted. The District plans to hold special budget study sessions on January 22nd and February 17th in addition to its regularly scheduled board meetings.

For more information, visit the school districts' websites: www.lafsd.k12.ca.us, www.orindaschools.org, www.moraga.k12.ca.us.

Gap Year - A World of Opportunity

By Cathy Tyson



Dan Eden in Poptun, Guatemala during his first week of the program
Photo provided

While his fellow Class of 2009 graduates were attending football games and sitting in college lecture halls, Moraga's Dan Eden spent three months traveling through Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Nicaragua working on a turtle conservation project, obtaining SCUBA certification, building solar water heaters and a host of other non-classroom activities.

"I went to the college fair at Saint Mary's College and wasn't excited about any of the universities

I saw there," said Eden. He did see a table for LeapNow, which advertises itself as "the most unique year of college on the planet" and specializes in study abroad and gap year programs. After doing some research, attending a workshop in San Francisco and with the advice of a college counselor, Eden signed up with Carpe Diem Education - which is associated with LeapNow - an organization whose semester programs are designed to challenge students through service and cul-

tural exchange.

While earning up to 18 units of college credit, he was able to experience the developing world first hand and hone his Spanish language skills. Additional programs from three months to three weeks are offered in Southeast Asia, Australia, India, South America, Africa and Japan.

The group that Eden was a part of had six young men and three young women, including a male and a female guide. Groups can reach a maximum size of 12 participants. Along with their service work, the students had daily Spanish class and journal writing. Everyone was able to post entries on the Carpe Diem blog. Toward the end of the experience, Eden wrote: "I have learned how to live in the moment and be appreciative of my life and most importantly myself."

Like many high school graduates, Eden wasn't exactly sure what he wanted to do after high school. Parents Lisa and Gene Eden were supportive, and recognized that not every student is ready to jump directly into four years of college. "For twelve years it's been all about school," said Gene Eden, "you need to learn about life experience - to get out into the real world. This was an opportunity to go out and try something you may enjoy and push yourself past your comfort zone." The family agreed there's a dominant mentality that most graduates are strongly encouraged to attend a university directly after graduation.

"I would absolutely recommend this to everyone - for me it has been so much better than tradi-

tional college," said Eden. "It was an excellent experience, a chance to be alone and independent." One added bonus - lack of electronics, no phone, no Facebook - which he felt was a very good thing. There were definitely challenging moments, at times rivaling the exertion of a Campo football workout. "We were moving all the time with heavy backpacks, and there were lots of mosquitoes," he notes.

A real highlight of his journey was the turtle project at Playa Langosta, Costa Rica - helping endangered turtles, like the 700 pound Baula turtle the students literally stumbled across. Their goal was to record information on the eggs she laid and bury them in a safer nest away from scavenging raccoons.

Eden is taking it easy at home at the moment, but has signed up for a spring program with Fundacion Mahatma Gandhi in the Dominican Republic, which is completely run by volunteers; it's part of the College of Saint Benedict's Alternative Break Experience. Participants spend time each day tutoring kids and running a soccer program in the afternoon.

He is waiting to hear back from a number of schools he has applied to for the fall 2010 term. He's hoping to get into UC Santa Cruz, but will have to wait like everyone else for their decision.

For more information on the programs noted above, go to www.leapnow.org or www.carpediemeducation.org. The cost of the Carpe Diem program is about the same as in-state tuition and includes all food, rustic accommodations and program activities.

Rheem's 3rd Annual Geo-Bee—Longest Ever

Submitted by Elaine Frank



Rheem Elementary School Geo-Bee winners (L to R): Eric Sweeney, runner-up; Navid Boozapour, 2nd runner-up; and Jacob Westphal, champion.

On Friday, January 8th, Rheem's 3rd through 5th grade students watched an impressive battle of wits and knowledge at the school's third annual National Geographic Bee. Twelve students (7 fifth graders and 5 fourth graders) took part in the final competition: Navid Boozapour, Quinn Cuddihy, Spencer Giglo, Janet Guo, Kate Miles, Olivia Morris, Daniel Nelson, Adam Shafer, Eric Sweeney, Andrew Tseng, Jacob Westphal, and Maria Wong. These students quali-

fied as finalists after being the top scorers in a preliminary written test that was given to all interested 4th and 5th graders in December.

The contest consisted of several rounds of questions, which challenged the finalists' knowledge of U.S. geography, continents, U.S. and world capital cities, and international culture. Part of the competition required finalists to use information on a U.S. map to answer questions about average travel time to work by state.

This year's competition broke all previous records for length and intensity. Although the contest began at 9:00 a.m., an intermission was needed so that the students could enjoy their 10:05 recess before returning to watch the exciting conclusion. After six rounds of questions, Eric Sweeney qualified for the championship round while Navid Boozapour and Jacob Westphal continued to compete for the second slot. After a grueling back-and-forth question and answer session, Jacob

earned a place alongside Eric in the championship round. The two finalists competed "Jeopardy style" by writing their answers on small white boards. The contest was finally decided in an impressive tie-breaker round, when Jacob Westphal became the school champion by answering the following question correctly:

Two peaks, Kibo and Mawansi, can be found at the top of what dormant volcano located about 140 miles south of Nairobi? (Answer: Kilimanjaro)

As the school champion, Jacob received a gold medal, a championship certificate, and the thrill of taking yet another test to see if he will be eligible to compete in the State Bee in April. Also, Eric, Navid, and Jacob each received a \$5 gift certificate to Powell's Sweet Shoppe in Lafayette, and as a special treat, all three boys will be treated to an all-expense paid trip to Starbucks with Rheem Principal, Ms. Frank.

Anyone can brush up on geography with GeoBee Challenge, an online geography quiz at www.nationalgeographic.com/geo-bee, which poses 10 new questions a day from previous National Geographic Bees.