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Letter to the Editor

LEAF BLOWERS

Editor:

I am sensitive to the issues of the pro-abolishment of leaf blowers, but when I weigh the pros and cons of the issue I find that I cannot support the cause.

When my husband died a number of years ago we had a memorial event at our home and, to our consternation, the gardeners of a nearby neighbor began using their leaf blowers. We politely explained the problem and they politely switched to quiet tools on that day. I would extend the same courtesy when requested. Problem solved!

My household budget for clearing the paths on my parcel is full; having to double it by eliminating the leaf blowers would create a burden for me. I hope that those who are urging the elimination of leaf blowers will show compassion for those who cannot afford to double their budgets for upkeep on their properties; I hope that they will not say "If you can't do it our way move out of Orinda."

Sincerely,
Shirl Fink

MEASURE A

Editor:

I have put off writing this letter long enough. My husband and I have lived in Orinda for 20 years. Our son is a graduate of Miramonte High School and has benefited from the wonderful education he received there. We have always supported the schools and voted continuously for taxes to support our schools. That being said, we have come to the point where we have to say STOP! The Acalanes High School District must stop treating the tax payers as their very own "blank check" - we simply cannot afford this anymore. The District asked for and received, a renewal of a never ending parcel tax less than six months ago. Do you mean to tell me that they didn't know at that time that more money would be required? We would be berating any public entity or private corporation that planned as poorly as the Acalanes High School District has. For well over a year we have all known that public education in this state is in a financial crisis. There has to be another solution - the district cannot continue to burden the property tax payers...we simply cannot afford this additional tax, and those that are sure to come in the future.

Even wealthy districts like ours at times have to make extraordinary sacrifices and this is one of those times. Maybe the district and the parents need to take a good hard look at their sense of what is absolutely necessary for a good education.

Please no more blank checks for the Acalanes High School District, we property tax payers simply can't afford it.

Eleanor Metrulas
Orinda

Dear Editor,

While the state continues to increase its spending on prisons, we are deconstructing quality education for our children and thereby compromise the strength of California's future economy.

Being the parent of a student who will be entering Miramonte High School next August, I am gravely concerned that programs that have existed and excelled for decades may now be eliminated. With many younger teachers on its staff, Miramonte has the potential to have the most teachers released in the district.

The concept of local schools should include a stable environment for students, not a rotation of staff caused by budget uncertainties. Recently, Miramonte was recognized as one of the top 100 schools in the country. It ranks in the top 1% of all the schools in California. To allow such a successful school to lose the programs which has made it so great should be of great concern to our community.

By supporting Measure A, Miramonte and the other high schools in the Acalanes Union High District will be made to offer seven periods of instruction to students, keep programs such as public speaking, and provide a comprehensive science curriculum.

Get smart, vote smart, vote for Measure A.

Inez Hollander Lake
Orinda

Editor:

I am writing today to support Measure A. A district wide loss of over 50 full time teaching positions resulting in fewer core and elective class offerings is unacceptable. Like many of you, my family moved to Moraga because of the outstanding school system. My older son graduated from Campolindo High School in 2008, and my younger son is currently a freshman. The loss of so many excellent teachers due to budget shortfalls means that my second child will not have the same educational opportunities that my first child enjoyed. For a mere 31 cents a day, we have the obligation to support the high standard of excellence that we expect from our high schools and educators in our district. Our schools have an excellent national reputation for graduating top-notch students that are well prepared for college and beyond but our students will suffer greatly with the loss of so many teachers. And don't forget, our property values benefit from the excellent schools long after our children have graduated. We live in a community where education is a priority. Let's continue this with the passage of Measure A.

Lynn Ransone-Fong
Moraga

To the Editor:

As an elected official, and also as a father, I strongly support Measure A, to raise temporary funding for the Acalanes Union High School District.

Everything that makes our communities great places to live is built on the foundation of the exceptional quality of our schools, the very best in the state. Without our first-class schools, we would never attract the community-minded citizens that contribute so much to our lives, never enjoy the high property values we still maintain, and never support our vibrant commerce and culture. The Acalanes District has already made painful cuts in administrative and custodial staff and increased class sizes. Its teachers and certified staff have agreed to salary and benefit reductions. The most recent cuts forced by state reductions would not permit our schools to live up to the standards we have come to expect. Merely adequate schools are not acceptable for our communities.

Recently I have been poring over college information with my daughter, trying to find colleges that offer, among other things, an architecture program. Her career interest grew directly from a class in architecture offered at Campolindo High School, the type of class we will never see again without your support for Measure A to continue the exceptional quality of schools we expect, -- and our children deserve.

Brandt Andersson
Lafayette

Dear Editor,

Through our involvement in PTA and the Moraga Education Foundation, we understand the excellent nature of the education students receive in our community. Additionally, we know that our students benefit from what may be an atypical California school environment. The students of the Acalanes Union High School District are noted locally, statewide, and nationally for positive achievements and shining examples of what public education should create. Quality programs, with educators to match, have allowed AUHSD graduates to have access to many outstanding universities. Our local high schools have ranked #1 in student achievement for three years in a row. This high level of achievement is now at risk.

Students have been told they will no longer be able to sign up for seven classes next fall. They will be limited to six as budget cuts eliminate many of the science, foreign language, English, art and mathematics classes they need to be competitive and successful after graduation.

Fortunately, we can do something to prevent these losses. We can vote Yes on Measure A and raise the local, emergency funds our schools need.

Kym and Tom Leserman
Moraga

To the Editor:

As a Campolindo High School graduate, Lafayette native and resident, parent of an Acalanes High School student and a Realtor specializing in this community, I understand the importance of a vibrant public school system. Nothing has a greater impact on the quality of life in a community than its schools.

The excellent K-12 schools are the primary factor that attracts people to move to Lafayette. The reason Realtors market the term "Acalanes schools" is because people throughout the Bay Area recognize the excellence of the schools in our district.

Unfortunately, the State is not currently able to provide for the educational programs that expand our students' options and enhance their educational experience. Measure A will provide desperately needed short-term funding to provide program stability to our award-winning high schools.

During tough economic times, it is important not to lose track of both the social and economic value of exemplary schools. A vote for Measure A is a strong investment in the future of our community and your property values!

Dana Green

Lafayette

Dear Editor,

Before you vote on the upcoming Measure A, please consider that this measure is on the ballot for one reason: to at least partially offset a series of major state budget cuts to local education. The most recent cut has reduced the Acalanes High School District budget by \$4.8 million for the upcoming year alone.

If Measure A does not pass, there is no "fat" left to cut. The District must eliminate one period (from seven to six), lay off quality teachers and counselors, and eliminate numerous elective and Advanced Placement courses. We have an incoming ninth grader as well as a seventh grader, and it breaks my heart to see what these continuing budget cuts have done to our outstanding schools.

Acalanes is the top-rated high school district in the state. The quality of these schools has a direct impact on our property values. Without Measure A, we lose many of the teachers and courses that give our students an outstanding education, and in turn lose far more in property value than the \$112 per year sought by the measure. Please vote "yes" on Measure A.

Dan Beaver
Moraga

To the Editor-

My family lives in Moraga because of the value this community places on education and the wholesome environment that comes with successful schools. It would be a shame to watch this social cornerstone lost to future generations. As an avid supporter of youth athletic programs in the community, I have the advantage of witnessing firsthand the benefit of having great kindergarten through high school educational options. Learning experiences available to students in the Acalanes Union High School District are critical to the intellectual and emotional development of our students.

Programs with a wide range of appeal provide students with varied interest an outlet for their talents and a level field for peer acceptance. Great schools meet both the academic and interpersonal needs of their students. When curricular areas such as band, choir, and visual art are reduced or eliminated, many students lose a chance to develop and share their unique talents.

Matt Westphal
Moraga

Dear Editor,

My two children had the advantage of attending Campolindo High School in the Acalanes Union High School District during a time of less economic turbulence in California. However, I have always believed that it is in the best interest of our community, state, and nation to preserve high quality school districts, while supporting and encouraging the progress of less successful ones. All schools and students matter.

Education is the backbone of our society. Public schools have made for strong social structures and the growth of our democracy. At a time when the future seems so uncertain, it is important for us to focus on the institutions responsible for much of what is positive and productive in our lives.

The students of our community and, in fact, all California students, need the same nurturing environment my children received. Schools are the rootstock of society and should be supported during hard times. We simply cannot afford to have students be the product of a mediocre educational system.

Measure A will continue the proud history of Lamorinda student achievement by providing educational options, so necessary in our globally competitive work environment. There is no greater legacy to pass along than that of strong schools for our young people.

Sandra Ruliffson
Moraga

Dear Editor:

It is a sad state of affairs when I am told that my incoming high school student may not be able to take some of the classes that are standard to a ninth grade education - and even sadder that the counselor who relayed this bad news doesn't know if she'll have a job next fall. California's education system is definitely in disrepair. The frustration we parents feel is overwhelming, as is a feeling of helplessness. It is simply not enough anymore to donate to our parent clubs and educational foundations. While we certainly will continue with our personal donations, our schools need something more. Right now, that something more is Measure A. A vote for Measure A is a proactive way to ensure that our high school system receives much needed revenue to save jobs and save classes. Please vote yes on Measure A.

Sincerely,
Wendy Dunn,

Lafayette

Dear Editor,

The Acalanes Union High School District is facing a \$4.8 million budget cut this year, the third year in a row of cuts. Ongoing cuts have limited access to core science and mathematics courses and dramatically increased most class sizes. The District has already reduced administrative staff by 20%, put custodial services on an every other day rotation and teachers have agreed to over \$1 million dollars in annual savings. Despite these cuts, the Acalanes District has been ranked #1 in the state for the last three years. While California has the largest economy in the country, we have lost the will to pay for basic services like education, with the results being that our students and future economy will suffer.

Voters are urged to support Measure A, the emergency temporary parcel tax, which will restore \$4 million in funding for the Acalanes District. 100% of Measure A funds will go directly to saving classes, programs and student services. If Measure A does not pass, more than 50 teaching positions will be eliminated. Senior citizens can apply for an exemption from Measure A. At only 31 cents per day per parcel, Measure A is an investment in our future.

Sincerely,

Truman Burns

Lafayette

Dear Editor,

A strong kindergarten through high school program requires sufficient funding to make student experiences meaningful and of a quality necessary to make a smooth transition between each level. As a parent of students in elementary, middle, and high school, I feel the Moraga School District and Acalanes Union High School District have provided the motivational, developmentally appropriate learning environment needed for student academic achievement.

Unfortunately, the ability of the Acalanes Union High School District to provide the quality of education expected by our community is now in jeopardy. Public concern resulted in the placement of Measure A on the ballot to allow citizens the chance to determine the future of our high schools.

Local support is what makes great districts possible in a time of such great economic concern. The ability to direct \$112 to support schools, rather than Sacramento, will preserve the programs desired by our community.

There is no better investment than the maintenance of high-achieving schools. Great schools are an integral part of a desirable community. They are the core of our society. A vote for Measure A will fill a funding gap and keep our educational standards high.

Margaret Mediati

Moraga

Dear Editor:

High school is no fun. As a Campolindo junior, I think I can say without a doubt that most of my peers would agree. But then again, high school isn't a joke, or a playground to fool around in. High school is serious business; serious preparation for college, a career, and a foundation for the rest of your life. High school is a place to learn, grow, and explore new ideas and points of view. I think high school is definitely one of the major factors in shaping a person. The rejection of Measure A would severely limit hard-working, aspiring students who are trying to grow as people and figure out what they want to do with their lives. By removing valued, inspirational teachers, cutting extracurricular and advanced classes, and getting rid of counselors dedicated to helping students excel and make the best future they possibly can, our district will lose some of the very things that make our schools so different from those around the state, or even the nation. Losing such important assets will cause students, from freshmen to seniors, to suffer. A lack of classes, both regular and advanced, and renowned electives will no longer separate us from schools in less-affluent districts. A shortage of teachers will no longer provide students with one-on-one aid and advice that students need to learn and understand difficult concepts. A complete abolishment of counselors will leave students with no one to turn to when facing questions about college, scholarships, majors, and careers.

Measure A is a necessary step to ensure that the children of our district can be successful, well-rounded, educated people. A well-known quote states "children are the future." Take away our education, and you take away the future. Please vote yes on Measure A.

Cheyenne Ziermann

Moraga

Dear Editor,

Being a PTA leader in Moraga has provided me with an enriching experience about what it takes to provide our students with excellent educational opportunities. One clear lesson I have learned is communities cannot depend on the state to provide for the appropriate needs of our schools.

Rather than discussing what damage has been inflicted on our schools by the massive reduction of funding, our legislators are now looking at ways to increase the level of cuts. Since in excess of 50% of all budget cuts last year were in the area of education, it is apparent our leaders do not value education in the same way as the citizens of Moraga.

The passage of Measure A would preserve the programs of the Acalanes High School District and allow the priorities of our community to circumvent the Sacramento budget axe. The reduction of educational options will narrow the spectrum of university options available to our students and erode the quality of life in our town.

We are fortunate to have an outstanding high school district. It would be truly sad to allow forces outside of the community to take this away. Support Measure A to keep our educational values intact.

Stacy Giglio
Moraga

To the Editor:

There is nothing more integral to the life style of a community than the schools it supports. Much can be learned about what is valued by the public by analyzing the social fabric of a town.

Lafayette has placed great emphasis on providing quality educational opportunities for its youth. Many of the foundational groups in the community have as the center of their mission the enhancement of student learning. Parent clubs in the two school districts, the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation, and the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation are organizations exemplifying the great concern of this city for the education of youth. With the current state funding shortfalls, the capstone educational experience for our students is now in jeopardy. Measure A would allow the vibrant programs of the Acalanes Union High School District to remain as a constant in the lives of our students.

It is my hope that strong schools are a tradition that the people of this area truly value. During tough times, communities must decide what they cherish. A Yes vote for Measure A will continue our belief in the primacy of our schools.

Cecilia Alagappan
Lafayette

Editor:

Voting YES on Measure A is a vote for our children. It is as simple as that. We volunteered in their classrooms, worked in the lunchrooms, coached their sports teams and sat for hours listening to them read when they were young. We drive them to events, sit for hours on the sidelines cheering them on and anxiously wait with them until their test results are published. After all that investment of time, money, emotion and love how can we turn our backs on them now? When everyone leaves the room, we remain. Our children have grown up believing that we can be depended upon. The government has failed them. Voting no will not result in a change in direction or policy from Sacramento. Voting no will mean less money, less teachers, fewer opportunities. It may be a sad truth, be we are all that is left. It is what we signed up for when we had children. Would you give up dinner and a movie for your kids? In a heartbeat. Vote YES and stay in for the night. Your children (and their children) will thank you.

Sharon Noble
Orinda

To the Editor:

Amidst the anxiety surrounding the recession and our state government's role in exacerbating its negative impact, it is worthwhile to focus our attention on what is working well. The Lamorinda community has a tradition of strong support for our excellent schools. High quality education is what inspired most of us to choose to live in this area, and current buyers agree: we continue to enjoy healthy and stable property values despite the real estate downturn. The Acalanes School District provides an education that rivals that of local private schools which charge three times as much as Acalanes spends per child. Unfortunately, the economic downturn and chaos at the state level have conspired to threaten what we value so highly and have all worked so hard to build.

In times of crisis, all stakeholders need to contribute to a solution, and fortunately, many groups have already taken action to reduce the impact on students. Those who suggest that excessive spending in the district is the problem are simply misinformed. The district has cut back administrative expenses by 20% over the last several years, Parents' Clubs and Foundations have stepped up fundraising efforts, teachers have made an exceptional contribution by voluntarily agreeing to higher class sizes and a 2.5% pay cut with no raises until at least 2012, and parents, businesses, and community members have given even more of their own diminished resources to help make up the difference. This cooperative effort is commendable, but it is not enough. An emergency parcel tax (Measure A) is a necessary step that will allow the district to fulfill its motto to "educate every student to excel and contribute in a global society." This is the least that Lamorinda property owners can do to support this critical aspect of our community, which, in addition to the obvious educational benefits clearly supports all of our property values. Please join us in voting yes.

Deb Stephenson & Mitchell Reed
Orinda

Dear Editor,

I am committed to public education and have been actively involved in supporting the Moraga schools since my children were in elementary school. During their middle school years, I served as Joaquin Moraga PTA president and legislative representative.

The state budget deficit continues to grow and funding to public education continues to be cut. The most viable alternative in the short run is local funding. As the parent of a Campolindo graduate who received an excellent education in preparation for college, as the parent of a current Campolindo freshman, and as an advocate for quality education for all students, I support the passage of Measure A to supplement the shortfall of state funding for the Acalanes Union High School District.

AUHSD is facing cuts next year of \$4.8 million, which will result in cutting core and elective classes. Three of my daughter's current teachers have received pink slips, and the music program she dearly loves is at risk. As citizens of the AUHSD community, we need to continue to support our schools and maintain the excellence we expect. This requires local support. Consequently, I am supporting the AUHSD Emergency Education Act of 2010-Measure A.

Erin Bydalek
Moraga

Dear Editor,

Some people may think that it's a bit premature for a Del Rey Elementary School parent to be so concerned about the impending budget cuts to Acalanes Union High School District. The cuts to AUHSD may not affect my 3rd grade child today, but if the district cuts \$4.8 million next year, how much will be cut the following years.

The state's non-partisan Legislative Analyst Office predicts the state will be in a budget crisis for at least four more years. The rebuilding of programs could take longer than a decade. The district served preliminary layoff notices for 56.9 full time teaching positions, which will impact all programs, not just electives.

Local support is the only alternative. Our schools need the help we can supply by supporting the Measure A parcel tax measure. We are fortunate to live in a community that has high regard for standards and great expectations for education. This five-year \$112 parcel tax will help maintain our high schools' excellent academic and elective programs. A "Yes" vote on Measure A is an investment in all students in the community.

Mary Friese
Orinda

Dear Editor:

As a teacher at Acalanes High School for the last 14 years I have seen how the monies provided by our parcel tax transformed our program offerings, class sizes, and support services, allowing us to provide a rich variety of curricular opportunity for every student, from the most academically gifted to those who struggle. Sadly, as the state has relentlessly solved its budget woes on the backs of K-12 education over the last several years, we have increasingly been forced to use those monies to "backfill" support for basic programs, like librarians and counselors. Class sizes have crept back up. As a negotiator for the teacher's union I helped craft a contract settlement this year that included pay cuts, benefit cuts, and further class size increases to help deal with the deficit. It was approved by over 80% of our membership. Despite all that, layoff notices went out to 75 of our 278 teachers, counselors, and librarians in March, and they will not be rescinded unless more than 66.6% of the voters now receiving ballots in their mailboxes send them with a vote in favor of Measure A, our emergency parcel tax, which runs for five years. By that time let us hope the state will have regained a measure of fiscal sanity and long-term thinking. I urge every resident of our district to vote in favor.

Erik Honda
English Department
Acalanes High School

Dear Editor,

As an Acalanes Union High School District teacher and a Moraga resident, I urge citizens to vote "yes" on Measure A. None of us likes higher taxes, but as the state budget has worsened, school districts find themselves having to rely on local resources to replace significantly diminished state funding.

Even in difficult times, students should never be the ones to end up paying the price for budget woes. Yet if Measure A fails, Acalanes District students will lose teachers, counselors, and classes that are vital to their education. They will end up with an entirely different high school experience than recent graduates have had. Our students are counting on us to do the right thing: agree to this emergency funding (less than \$10 a month) to get through this crisis.

I am so proud to be part of a community that values education and recognizes the importance of investing in our schools. When my family moved from Pleasant Hill to Moraga, we, like many other Lamorinda families, were primarily motivated by the quality public schools. Please help maintain this quality by voting "yes" on Measure A.

Sincerely,
Adrienne Spencer
Moraga

Editor:

Lamorinda Parents Are Lucky

I want the residents of Lamorinda, especially those who have children currently attending or have in the past attended the school system, to know how lucky they are.

The average Lamorinda household pays \$6,300 in "basic" (1%) property tax. 54% of that, \$3,400, goes to schools. This is the deal of the century for the families who utilize those schools. At Miramonte, the community, mostly parents, also contributes about \$2 million annually (\$1,500 per student) annually, which is commendable. But consider what the option is.

Tuition at a local private high school is \$30,000. 15% of that is to provide financial aid that 25% of the students receive but the actual cost is still \$25,000 per student. In addition, the school raises over \$2,000 per student in donations, mostly from the families of current students.

And these are not crazy wealthy families. No more so than the families that send their children to Miramonte, Campolindo, and Acalanes. Sure there are a couple Mercedes and BMWs in the parking lot, but there are a lot more Chevys and Toyotas.

In Oakland, 1/3 of all students do NOT attend school in the Oakland Unified School District. They are forced to seek alternatives.

So while the community needs to value its school system and support it (Yes on Measure A) because its property values reflect its good schools (plus it is just plain smart to educate our children well), the families of those children attending those schools can do a LOT more than they are. You are so fortunate to have the schools that you have.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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