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Lamorinda Schools

Lafayette Elementary | Los Perales | Miramonte | Orinda Academy Orinda Intermediate | Saklan Valley School | Sleepy Hollow Springhill | Stanley Middle | St. Perpetua School | Wagner Ranch

Nickerson to Take the Helm at AUHSD

By Sophie Braccini



Dr. John Nickerson

Photo Jill Ramsay

Dr. John Nickerson will become Superintendent of the Acalanes Union High School District on May 1st, upon the retirement of John Stockton. Currently serving as the District's Associate Superintendent of Educational Services, Nickerson has been involved in the District for 15 years; as a teacher at Miramonte, assistant principal at Campolindo, then principal at Acalanes before moving to the District office.

"I care a lot about this District," says Nickerson, "I feel ready for this position. In these difficult times, I can bring some stability to the District." Nickerson, who met his wife while they were both teaching at Miramonte and has children in 3rd and 6th grade in the San Ramon School District, adds that he feels fortunate to have this opportunity.

As a young graduate from the Harvard's School of Economics, Nickerson decided to respond to the request of a faculty member who was pursuing research in Kenya and went there to teach for two years. "After a few months I became the headmaster of this harambee school," explains Nickerson, "it was a life changing experience. I fell in love with the notion of becoming an educator, and developing a relationship with a community. And I was also introduced to school leadership."

Upon his return, Nickerson taught in Brooklyn, New York, before coming back to California (he grew up in

Long Beach), getting his masters and teaching credential at UC Berkeley and pursuing his teaching career first at Piedmont High School then at Miramonte.

While principal at Acalanes, he worked on his PhD dissertation with the University of La Verne. "I did my research on cognitive conflict," explains Nickerson, "I studied how we can get to the best decision when people do not agree; how this dynamic can function well." Nickerson measured productive disagreements in school districts where excellent decision-making happens. "For this productive way to work you need an environment where people feel safe to disagree, some level of trust," he says.

In his new position, Nickerson's first order of business will be dictated by the State budget. "The short term challenge is—how do we maintain the quality and great opportunity we offer our students?" asks Nickerson. "A large number of students come to school equipped to learn and excel. That said, a crisis like the one we are facing can be detrimental to the enrichment opportunities we have been able to offer and that the kids deserve."

Thanks to Measure A, that was recently passed by voters, the District should not have to issue pink slips for the 2011-2012 school year; although some temporary teachers might not be asked to come back for another

year. Nickerson says the real challenge will be the 2012-2013 school year. "There are a lot of unknowns," he admits, "and we could face a loss of funding between \$2 and \$4 million dollars a year."

Nonetheless, Nickerson is looking toward innovation. "One of the areas where we have historically struggled is in supporting students that are not achieving, not accessing the curriculum," he says. "Tutoring programs are offered; we are starting to do more parallel classes in Math and English to develop foundational skills, and some of the preliminary data suggests that it is effective. We are also working on how to differentiate teaching to a whole class, and that's increasingly challenging with class size going up."

Another area where innovation has taken place under his leadership as Associate Superintendent is testing. "This year we did something completely new in our four schools: all of the World History students in 9th grade were asked to analyze primary source documents in their historical context, and make an argument or develop a thesis," explains Nickerson, "The teachers discussed the results together and built upon it through the school year."

Nickerson also sees opportunity in the meaningful integration of new technology in teaching. "Some classes are starting to use iPads for reading at Acalanes and Miramonte," says Nickerson, "teachers report that digital reading increases the ability of students to analyze text. They can manipulate it, check words, color code by theme, and add comments as they read." He envisions, in the next 5-10 years, a world in which students don't have to carry heavy backpacks; just a digital reader to access textbooks that will be constantly updated and enriched.

"I feel lucky to be working with a staff and teachers who are so innovative," says Nickerson. The only thing that may stand in the District's way is the money.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Acalanes Union High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Next: Wednesday, March 9, 7:30pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, March 7, 4pm

Lafayette School District
LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, March 9, 7pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, March 8, at 7:30pm

Registration for Moraga students entering Kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year

Moraga - March 3-4 at these schools and times:

Camino Pablo Elementary
9-11:45am, & 1:15-3:00pm, 1111 Camino Pablo, 376-4435

Los Perales Elementary
9am-2pm, 22 Wakefield Drive, 631-0105

Rheem Elementary
9am-2pm
90 Laird Drive, 376-4441

Information regarding Moraga registration requirements is available at www.moraga.k12.ca.us.

Springhill Pack 200 Celebrates 60th Anniversary

Submitted by Jean Follmer



Pack 200 Leader David Browne awards Springhill Principal Bruce Wodhams at the Blue and Gold Event. Photo provided by Suzanne Campillo

Lafayette's Cub Scout Pack 200 recently celebrated its 60th anniversary at the annual Blue and Gold Event. Original founding member, Phil Condit, was slated to attend. Born and raised in Lafayette, Condit went on to become the President and CEO of Boeing from 1996-2004. Ironically, Condit was unable to attend because his flight was cancelled due to a mechanical failure. Announcer David Browne joked that Condit was surely on a French plane rather than a Boeing.

Fortunately, retiring Springhill principal Bruce Wodhams was able to transport himself to the celebration by automobile. Wodhams has served as the Springhill principal for 24 years and has been a great supporter of the Cub Scouts during his tenure. Pack 200 honored Wodhams for his dedication over the years and the Cub Scouts enjoyed a slide show that captured their beloved principal from

boyhood through adulthood. "I am most grateful for the exceptional acknowledgment that Cub Scout Pack 200 afforded me on the occasion of my impending retirement. I was truly taken aback by the level of attention, graciousness and generosity that was provided me at last Wednesday's Blue & Gold Banquet. It is a night I will long remember and the banquet itself a tradition I will sorely miss. It has been a rare and distinct pleasure to be associated with such a fine organization as Cub Scout Pack 200 for the last twenty-four years. It has always reminded me of my own time in Cub Scouts many years ago and I thank them for keeping that valued memory so fresh. A special thanks goes to Robert Raffel, David Browne, Melissa Lee and Carol Davis for their part in last week's presentation. Thank you, scouts. Keep standing tall on the Six Pillars of Character Counts," Wodhams shared.

Family Focus

Handling Your Child's Electronics Habit

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

Is your daughter part of what I call the teen CNN syndrome where she needs to text her friends or go on Facebook practically round the clock for critical fast-breaking news—such as who got grounded or who just bought new shoes? Is your son zoned out in his computer or video game trance which can last for hours? Are you having trouble like many of us keeping up with the latest "i-something" or other device, and whether it's something you even want your child to have?

But more importantly, is your child's electronics habit interfering with family time, school and other responsibilities, a social life (for the solitary video game-players), or sleep? It's easy for children to become addicted to texting back and forth, being online, watching television, and playing video games. As a matter of fact, many adults have one or more of these habits. Each of these activities is compelling for many reasons, and they all provide recreation and diversion.

The problem arises when a child uses his electronic device in a compulsive way and is unable to break away on his own. Parents need to become the regulators and enforcers since children often have a hard time setting limits for themselves. But unless you are with your child 24/7, it is hard to control how he spends his time.

One teen I worked with, a high school sophomore, had a texting habit of over 3,000 texts a month, and that isn't even considered extreme these days. Still, that was an average of 100 texts per day which involved a lot of time. The reason I say she had a habit is that she compulsively checked her phone all day and throughout the night, resulting in interrupted and insufficient sleep. "Mia" also watched television over five hours per day on average. Mia's mom was a single parent who worked full-time, so Mia had free reign after school when she got

home. Mia refused to change any of her behavior as her grades and relationship with her mother rapidly deteriorated.

In addition to seeing Mia, who was depressed and not taking good care of herself physically, I worked separately with her mother to encourage her to set better limits with Mia. Her mother had previously resorted to nagging, yelling, threatening punishments without consistently implementing them, and virtually throwing up her hands. Now her mom needed to figure out a plan for Mia that she could monitor. And she needed to stop letting her desire to get along with Mia deter her from risking being the "bad guy" for a while.

Predictably, Mia didn't like most of her mother's new rules for her. Her mother shut down the cable TV and the home computer until she got home from work, and she also took Mia's phone away except for a two hour window of time per night when Mia could either use her phone, watch TV, or use the computer. If Mia's grades and attitude didn't improve, her mother would take away these privileges altogether. The only exception would be when Mia needed the computer for schoolwork, and then her mother would monitor its use closely. Since in the past Mia resisted her mother's attempts to regulate her electronics use, her mother would need to take Mia's cell phone to work with her and to sleep with it under her pillow at night. Extreme measures, perhaps, but Mia needed to get her life more balanced.

There were some immediate positive outcomes for both Mia and her mother. Mia had requested joining a local gym to work out and take yoga classes, but her mother hadn't wanted to spend the money. Now Mia's mom saw the importance of providing Mia with healthy alternatives to her electronics fixations and got a gym membership for both of them. Also, Mia and her mom signed up together for a

weekly cooking class. Mia got more sleep and was able to stay awake and focus better in school. And since Mia's mom now had a systematic approach, she didn't need to make impromptu and usually inflammatory disciplinary decisions, so their relationship gradually improved.

A key basis for mental, social, and emotional success is achieving balance in our lives. If your child shows signs of excessive electronics use, it is important to help him moderate his habit. Often, before children can achieve self-discipline they need external guidance and limits from the adults in their lives. And, it goes without saying that they also need you to provide them with your own good example of self-discipline. We want our children to leave space for unstructured brain time so they can think, feel, daydream, and create. We want to encourage them to interact with their friends in person and not just via electronic devices. And we want them to leave time for their families so that we can help them build lasting relationships and memories with us.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com. She is also available for parenting consultation.

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