

Published January 4th, 2012

Lafayette and Orinda Union School Districts Welcome New Directors for Special Education

By Courtney Bennett



From left: Brian Inglesby and John Egnor Photo provided

In the summer of 2011, both the Lafayette and Orinda Union School Districts welcomed new special services directors, when, by coincidence, the former directors for both districts retired with a combined 26 years of service between them. Lafayette Union School District's new Director of Student Services is John Egnor, and Orinda Union School District's new Director of Special Services and Personnel is Brian Inglesby. Working closely with the community, staff and administration, the Directors oversee the development, delivery and evaluation of special education services to students in their districts.

John Egnor -

Lafayette's New Director

He may have only been in his new position as special services director for five months, but John Egnor is already impressed with Lafayette's level of support for education. "I have never worked in an area before where so many people are committed to supporting the school district," he says. And according to Egnor, the feeling is mutual, with administrators to teachers conveying a genuine appreciation for the community's support.

Egnor brings almost two decades of experience in special education to his new position. He first worked directly with students as a school psychologist in Southern California before transitioning to special education administration. Most recently he served as Coordinator of Special Education for a school in Big Bear, California. He earned a master's in education from Azusa Pacific University

with an emphasis in school psychology. As an undergraduate at Rochester College in Michigan, he majored in religious studies.

When asked what drew him to special education, Egnor said that different life experiences and relationships with people who were dealing with disabled family members compelled him to work with students with disabilities. Part of his motivation is rooting for the underdog; another part is wanting to provide equal opportunity for all individuals. "I feel a lot of satisfaction when I'm in a meeting with a parent or teacher and can help them think of different ways to provide information to a student with a different ability level," he says, "and then watching that student grow."

In all the districts where Egnor has worked, he believes that he has strengthened the relationships between administration and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers and students. In his last district, for example there was no type of parent-teacher alliance between parents of kids with disabilities and educators. Egnor instituted monthly meetings with parents, teachers and support staff to provide a forum to discuss trends and research in the field of special education, and to think about creative ways to meet students' needs. He says that he's most proud of his efforts to help people understand and work alongside each other to benefit students. "Ultimately that's what educators care about - how to help students reach their potential," he says. "By working together we focus on our students and they thrive in that environment."

Lafayette School District Superintendent Fred Brill describes Egnor as a "thoughtful individual, skilled listener and knowledgeable practitioner," and says he is impressed with Egnor's system-wide capacity building approach. "John is going beyond the critical work of meeting the individual needs of children with special needs, by also trying to build capacity among the instructors, aides and staff in the District," says Brill, who also calls Egnor's outreach to parents "impressive." Brill notes, "He wants to meet with people and learn what we're doing well and what we can improve."

A West Virginia native, Egnor married his high school sweetheart, who also worked as a school psychologist. Together they traveled extensively and lived in Europe before moving to California, where they've lived for about 12 years. While they visit family in West Virginia often, they are happy to live in California. "My wife and I joke that once you spent a winter in California you can't go back," Egnor says, adding that they particularly appreciate California's diversity and physical beauty.

Egnor says that his biggest challenge at this point is simply being the new kid on the block, with a much-loved predecessor who had held the position for 14 years. He admits that it's "hard to come in as a new person and garner

trust with school staff and community. No one knows me and I have to spend a lot of time building relationships and getting to know people," he says. "I'm not trying to fill my predecessor's shoes, I'm trying to set my own course." His ultimate goal is to build on what's worked in the past and to give a voice to all the different stakeholders. "I want to create a culture of openness among teachers and parents, and all the other stakeholders, and empower everyone involved," he says.

Brian Inglesby -
Orinda's New Director

Being an educator isn't just a profession for Orinda's new Director of Special Services and Personnel, Brian Inglesby, it's a family tradition. Both of his parents were East Bay teachers. His mother taught elementary school in Pleasanton, and his dad taught high school biology and coached football in Dublin and Pleasanton. As teachers, his parents reinforced the importance of patience, caring, and looking for the positive in every student. "They also emphasized the need for perseverance and practice, practice, practice, in order to excel - whether it's math, writing, reading, spelling, basketball, music, or football," he says.

Inglesby brings two decades of experience of working with children in special education in Northern California schools. For 16 years he worked directly with children as a school psychologist in San Mateo County. Before taking the job in Orinda, he was the education services director for Woodside Elementary School. Inglesby says that he still uses the "lens of a school psychologist" to inform his work as an administrator.

"School psychologists do a lot of analysis and detective work to determine the particular learning strengths and needs of a student, and then put that plan into action with the necessary pieces - such as the methodologies, curriculum, and support personnel," he says. As a psychologist, he has worked with children across the age and developmental spectrum, which gave him a strong understanding of specific developmental milestones, while also teaching him to look ahead and think about how to prepare students to succeed later in school.

Although Inglesby is new to Orinda, it's a home coming of sorts for the East Bay native, who was born in Walnut Creek and grew up in Pleasanton. Inglesby studied psychology as an undergraduate at UC Santa Cruz, earned a master's in school psychology at San Francisco State University, and is currently working on a doctorate at UC Berkeley's School of Education. His dissertation focuses on school principals and their experience with special education services, because Inglesby believes that principals are the key to success with special education services in schools. "I have learned that principals arrive with a wide range of experience with special education services," he says. "Some have a lot of experience with services such as IEPs (Individualized Education Plans), while others need more support." One of his primary roles as Special Services Director is to consult with principals and serve as a resource for them, as well as for school staff and families.

Another important part of Inglesby's job is overseeing personnel for the Orinda Union School District. As personnel director he oversees the hiring, regulations, policies, practices for both certificated (e.g., teachers, specialists) and classified (e.g., aides, maintenance, office support staff) personnel.

As special services director, Inglesby participates in many meetings that bring together teachers, students, parents and specialists, and it's this team aspect of special education that he particularly enjoys. Inglesby notes that complicated cases can have 20 people contributing to a child's education. "It's a powerful experience when a group of people work together over an extended period of time and pool their resources to help a child succeed," he says. "I enjoy building teams and facilitating that process." Orinda parent Anna Tague, who founded a support group for parents of children in special education in the Orinda Union School District, has noticed and appreciated his engagement and willingness to be a team player. "I appreciate the energy and enthusiasm Brian brings to his role," she says. "At our first meeting he was genuinely interested in learning as much as he could about my daughter so he could help her receive the support she needs."

When asked what professional accomplishment he points to with pride, Inglesby says that in the districts where he's worked, he has been part of collaborative team that helped to significantly increase STAR scores for students with disabilities. He also highlights his work creating a more coherent and comprehensive plan for aligning special education services with regular education standards.

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