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Acalanes High School freshman Elena Mountin hard at work.

Photo Uma Unni

## Survey Points to Stressed-Out Students

By Uma Unni

In the spring of 2015, students at all four schools in the Acalanes Union High School District took the Stanford Survey of Adolescent School Experiences, more commonly referred to as the “stress test.” This survey was administered by the Challenge Success program, a nonprofit group associated with the Stanford Graduate School of Education. The survey gauged student perceptions of a wide variety of subjects, ranging from homework load and school stress to academic in-

tegrity and engagement. Based on the results of the survey, the Challenge Success program is working with the school district to create a less stressful and more engaging school environment for students.

The district has a lot of work to do. According to the survey, 83 percent of Campolindo High School students reported often feeling stressed by school work (Acalanes and Miramonte had similar numbers); 42 percent of

Miramonte students suffered from exhaustion, headaches or had trouble sleeping; and 96 percent of Acalanes students admitted to cheating in the past year (cheating was broadly defined by the survey, ranging from copying homework to cheating on tests).

A natural conclusion to draw from the results is that students are anxious because they care too deeply about school, but further data suggests otherwise.

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## No Drought in EBMUD Employee Compensation

By Nick Marnell

The public's relationship with fire and water is stewarded in Lamorinda for the most part by the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Each entity has recently struggled through adversity. The management of one agency responded to its crisis by cutting salaries, thereby sharing the burden with its customers, while the other agency placed the burden almost entirely on the backs of its customers and continued to increase total compensation for its employees.

The Great Recession battered MOFD, with property tax receipts – its major source of revenue – falling and not keeping up with expenses. Despite the district carrying a negative balance in its general fund and being warned by its auditor that it was running out of cash, then-president John Wyro famously told district residents in 2013, “There is no need to raise taxes.” The district has kept that word to date.

Not only did MOFD decline to stick the public

with a tax increase, management and labor both agreed to wage concessions to help the district weather its financial crisis. The firefighters received no raise from 2008 until 2015. In fact, their wages were cut a further 3.5 percent in 2014. Fire Chief Stephen Healy also took a 3.5 percent salary cut in 2014, and each of his battalion chiefs received the same pay reduction.

While MOFD experienced a property tax decrease, EBMUD experienced an inventory decrease. The state water shortage became so severe that Gov. Jerry Brown declared in 2015 that California was into the fourth year of a drought, ordering water customers to cut usage by 25 percent from 2013 levels. EBMUD reacted quickly to this threat to its revenue. But unlike MOFD, the district placed most of the burden of its potential revenue shortfall on its customers. EBMUD raised rates 8 percent to compensate for the water shortage – in effect, penalizing those who conserved – and hammered its customers with drought surcharges of up

to 23 percent. The water district also slapped its customers with an excessive use penalty of \$2 for every unit consumed over an 80-unit threshold, and it publicized the names of the excessive users. “If needed, the penalty can get a lot tougher,” said district spokeswoman Abby Figueroa at an Oct. 16 news conference. (The Lamorinda Weekly received the list of Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda excessive water users from EBMUD, but has declined to publish the names.)

Despite the onus placed upon its customers, not one member of the EBMUD senior management team has taken a cent less in total compensation since the beginning of the drought in 2012. For example, based on records supplied by the district, EBMUD general manager Alexander Coate's total compensation increased 19.8 percent between 2012 and 2014. And unlike the MOFD rank and file during their hard times, none of the EBMUD labor groups have taken a pay cut during the four years of drought conditions. ... continued on page A8

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