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Sustainable inclusion project a win-win-win

By Pippa Fisher

Lafayette school kids are channeling their creative talents, learning leadership skills, and making the community more welcoming and inclusive all while keeping a significant amount of trash out of landfill. And all of this is a result of an idea to repurpose all those Measure L signs.

It was an idea that first came to Lafayette School District Governing Board President Rob Sturm following his 2016 election campaign when faced with the many signs he had bought and the question of what to do with them.

"Sustainability is a big deal for me and it pained me to see so many of these signs becoming landfill," said Sturm. "It occurred that the signs could easily be reused as a children's art project with whitewashing." Sturm said his children enjoyed making welcoming signs and planting them in the neighborhood back in 2016.

Now the idea is being enthusiastically welcomed as a way to keep hundreds of the district's Parcel Tax Measure L signs from becoming landfill following the March election. Additionally the Chamber of Commerce has given the Res Run signs for repurposing, adding to already donated signs leftover from Prop 22. According to Sturm, "The concept is to have our LafSD Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committees arrange for local children to decorate the signs with DEI symbols, artwork and/or welcoming words and then replant the signs within our community to validate that all people are welcomed and valued in Lafayette."

In charge of this project is Susan Wiggen, head of Rapport - a Lafayette group that serves as the hub for the various Lafayette School District parent organizations.

Wiggen explains that the point of this initiative is to empower the children to take on leadership in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She says that at the elementary level the District DEI committee brought No Place for Hate - a self-directed program intended to help members of school communities - to the district, then to principals. The middle school has the SLAM (Student Leaders' Anti-racism Movement) program involving 60 student leaders working with Dr. Lori Watson.

"Although each school is organizing these groups in a different manner, one idea is to really empower our student leaders to help with the anti-racism, etc., messaging," says Wiggen.

Springhill Elementary School fifth-grader Lucy Silva appreciates the No Place for Hate program.

Lucy explains, "I joined the No Place for Hate committee because I think the world can use more kindness, I believe Black Lives Matter, and I think that making these signs for everyone to see helps everyone feel like they belong."

Wiggen believes that this particular project is a great example of a simple way to empower children's voices, in addition to helping keep valuable, reusable signs out of landfills. "The kids get a sense of pride and ownership while spreading crucial messages around diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our community by repurposing signs that would likely end up in landfills," she says. "And they do this while having fun!"

Sturm describes these creative projects with meaningful, teaching moments as a "win-win-win."

Rapport is working with DEI parent volunteers to distribute the old signs to the students. They hope to have some signs finished during the winter break and to do the bulk of them in early January.

After that the welcoming signs will be appearing around town.

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