

SCHOOL CALENDAR

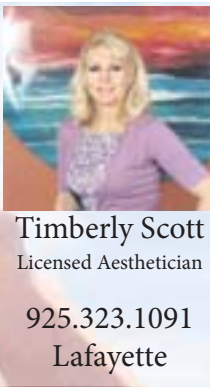
Acalanes Union
High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 6pm –
Special Board Annual Reorganization Meeting
Wednesday, Dec. 10 at 7:30pm –
Regular Board Meeting

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Lamorinda Schools

Character Counts! – Character Education in our Schools

By Jean Follmer

“We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.” –Martin Luther King, Jr.

“To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” –Theodore Roosevelt

The idea of Character Education in schools is hardly a novel concept. It's actually required in the California Education Code. Section 233.5 (a) reads: “Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government. (b) Each teacher is also encouraged to create and foster an environment that encourages pupils to realize their full potential and that is free from discriminatory attitudes, practices, events, or activities, in order to prevent acts of hate violence, as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 233.”

Let's take cheating for example. The Josephson Institute recently released the results of a survey conducted with high school students. The self-reporting survey found that 64% of high school students had cheated on a test within the past year. This is up from 60% in the 2004 survey. Of those who admitted to cheating, 38% had cheated more than once on a test within the past year.

It's important to remember it was a self-reporting survey so the results only reflect the kids that actually admitted to cheating. We don't know how high the number really is. We've all heard the saying “You're only cheating yourselves.” Forenti says that's not the case. “You're not only cheating yourself. You're cheating everyone who took the test fairly,” said Forenti. Forenti said kids cheat because they don't think they'll be caught and they're likely to benefit from it.

By comparison, 30% of the teens responded they have stolen

from a store within the past year, 42% admitted that they sometimes lie to save money and 83% admitted they'd lied to a parent about something significant. Forenti said it's not a case of bad kids so much as the result of kids receiving inconsistent messages. He offered the example of using a radar detector and showing your kids to only follow the rules when you think you may get caught. Forenti noted that Ken Lay of Enron was a bright person who got caught in the “legal versus ethical” debate in the board room.

The Josephson Institute has aided many school districts and communities in their quests for character development through its program Character Counts. The Lafayette School District is piloting the program this year at Springhill Elementary. The program is based on six pillars: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

Last summer, 4 parents and 4 staff members (including the principal) attended an intensive 4-day Character Counts session in San Francisco. The school is implementing the program in a multi-faceted way. The idea is TEAM:

Teach children that their character counts, Enforce the six pillars of character, Advocate character and Model good behavior. The language of Character Counts is moving through the school and the children are experiencing behavior reinforcement based on the six pillars. All staff members have been educated on the pillars and a parent education night was recently offered.

The plan is for the Character Counts program to expand to Burton Valley Elementary, Happy Valley Elementary, Lafayette Elementary, Stanley Middle School and the greater community, but the process needs to progress naturally so it takes root. Principals from all Lafayette schools have been introduced to the program. “It's a gradual process. The kids are embracing it. They're using the terminology. We want to make it natural; whether we're teaching math or physical education. It takes many, many years for it to take hold in the community,” said Springhill Principal Bruce Wodhams.

For more information about the program, visit www.josephsoninstitute.org or www.charactercounts.org.

Why Our College?

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Private colleges often ask the question, “Why do you want to attend our school?” The way you respond lets the college know if you have done some research and understand what the college offers, and how the school can meet your needs. The student who has struggled to understand what she wants and needs, and who thinks seriously about how she learns best, is in a far better position to write an authentic and thoughtful response. My goal in this article is to encourage students to get clear about the reasons they are applying to particular schools so that they can address this important essay question.

Virtually every college has a mission and associated values. The student's job is to learn what that mission is and what values it reflects. Then compare your needs with the college's mission. The more information students acquires, the

greater the likelihood of a making a good match.

Here is what you should learn about each college before you apply:

- Understand the educational program and the substance and thinking behind it.
- Know the core curriculum and what classes satisfy these requirements. Some colleges offer a structured core, reflecting the belief that liberal arts education should focus on root intellectual skills in a wide range of subjects; other schools are more flexible and allow the student to define the course of study.
- Acquire an understanding about how the core curriculum classes, or absence of these requirements, relate to the mission of the school. Put simply, understand the school's educational philosophy.
- Get acquainted with the social climate of the campus—does it lean more toward competition or collaboration?
- Get a handle on how faculty teaching and research obligations fall relative to each other; in particular learn the degree to which faculty teach and advise first year students.
- High standards often equate to higher levels of learning. What are the expectations and standards set by the college?
- Frequent assessment and prompt feedback still rank among the best strategies for helping students learn. Find out how the college measures up.
- Find out what the teaching practices are in classes you will take as a freshman and think about whether these are the ways you learn best

(e.g., lectures versus small group seminars or a little of both)

- Learn about how and when students can access faculty (e.g., regular office hours; availability after class, email messages)

Here are strategies to use to learn about the schools on your list:

- Use multiple sources; read several guidebooks and compare reviews. If you find conflicting information, ask an undergraduate admissions officer at the college to clarify.
- Talk to advisors who know colleges well enough to add to your information base.
- Use the web and dig deep. Go beyond the marketing of the college's website to glean all the information you can about the college's “personality.” Look at the depth of course offerings in areas that interest you; check out special seminars and guest speakers; read the school's newspaper to get a feel for “hot-but-not” issues, often reflective of student body's political and social orientation. “Google” the college and find news articles or even the most recent baccalaureate address.
- Email faculty and students who are doing things that interest you. Ask a well-researched question. Do you get a response in a timely way? Do you get a response?
- Contact your regional admissions representative and introduce yourself. Then ask several well thought out questions that you could not easily find answers to yourself.
- Visit the college, preferably after you have done good research. Stay overnight, talk with students about

their experiences, and arrange to sit in on one lower and one upper division class in subjects that interest you.

- Arrange an interview. College selection is a two-way street. If you have done your research, you will shine in the interview and learn more about the school.

You are going to spend at least four years at college. So it is you, the student, who needs to be selective. My advice is to identify about 15 schools you might be interested in and take a preliminary look. Select 10 for further study and try to answer the question “Why would I want to go there?” In the end focus on a handful of colleges you are truly interested in. Do your homework and you will be applying to colleges that meet your needs, interests, and learning style. Your effort will pay off. If you know what you are searching for in a college, you will increase your chances of acceptance, in part because you will do a far better job articulating your hopes and interests in your application essays.

Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is a certified college advisor who lives and works in Lafayette. Dr. LaScala draws on 20 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. She has 3 children—one a graduate of Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), one a sophomore at MIT and the youngest, a junior in high school. Contact Dr. LaScala at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

New School Bus Service for Acalanes High School

By Jean Follmer

The Lamorinda School Bus Program has extended its service by offering morning bus service to Acalanes students in the Reliez Valley area. Stanley Middle School routes 22 and 29 currently have availability because a number of 8th graders moved on to Acalanes this year. Route 22 runs down Re-

liez Valley Road to Pleasant Hill and Route 29 serves the Gloria Terrace/Stage Coach Drive area before running down Taylor Boulevard to Pleasant Hill. Service is available every morning but Wednesday due to Stanley's late Wednesday start time. The cost of a bus pass is \$150 for the period December, 2008 to

June, 2009. “This is the first time we've been able to offer service to Acalanes High School since we started in 1994,” said LSBP Manager Juliet Hansen. For more information, or to purchase a bus pass, visit www.lamorindaschoolbus.org or call 925-299-3216.



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