

Campo Music in the Line of Fire

By Sophie Braccini

Many came in their music uniforms, some came with their parents, and some came from middle school. Hundreds of students arrived at the Board meeting of the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) on Wednesday, March 19th. They came to urge the Board not to dismantle the music program for which Campolindo High School is famous.

The budget was not on the Board's agenda that night. In planning for Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts, the AUHSD had indicated it may be forced to reduce the hours of two music teachers at Campo. Band teacher Harvey Benstein and choir teacher Stacey Kikkawa received notification. The consequence may be that music teachers will have to cover more than one school.

Jim Negri explained that the issue is twofold, "Our District has seen declining enrollment. We have 150 fewer students district-wide and as incoming 9th graders have made their elective choices, we already know that the number of music students at Campolindo is on the decline. We have more teachers under contract than registration supports and seniority is law (in determining the order of lay-offs). Furthermore, the proposed State budget forces us to make cuts." Parents and students who came in support of the very successful program were prepared to address both issues.

Crayford Burrell, the father of two Campo students, insisted that dedicated full-time teachers were essential to the pursuit of the excellence that has characterized the Campolindo music program. To address declining enrollment, he suggested that the District pump up the program and "add more classes, such as beginning instrument, history of music, JV jazz band and new vocal classes."

David McKenzie, whose daughter graduated from Campolindo last year, told the Board how his child had benefitted from the music program. "Choir has been life changing for my daughter," he said, "and parents are willing to work with the district to make this work."

It was clear from the parents' presentation that the community is ready to pitch in financially to support the program. But according to Jim Negri, things are not that simple. "We are willing to work with the PTAs, Parents Clubs and Foundations, and they are already contributing \$250,000 each to help us address our budget crisis," said Negri, "but creating specific fundraising at one school to pay salaries is legally very difficult."

The students who spoke that evening expressed their feelings about what the music program means to them. One young man said it gave him "a sense of unity," while another expressed how the choir gave its members a sense of pride.

Finally, future Campolindo students came to plea. Many Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students had joined their elders in the audience. Two of them addressed the Board with passion, explaining how music



Campo students protest Friday morning

Photo Andy Scheck

is important to a well-rounded individual and urging the Board to consider music as a core subject like English and Math.

Board President Judy Carney explained to the crowd that the Brown Act, which regulates the public's right to access and participate in government meetings, does not authorize the discussion of items not on the agenda. Although the Board couldn't discuss what had been said, she indicated they would certainly take it into account.

Music supporters take note: On April 16th the Board should discuss budgetary priorities; check the agenda at <http://www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/>. The Superintendent urged the audience to signed letters to state legislators to amend the proposed budget. Sample letters can be found at <http://www.lastrampaspta.org/letters.html>.