

## SCHOOL CALENDAR

### School Governing Board Meetings

**Acalanes Union**  
High School District  
Board Room AUHSD Office  
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette  
Wednesday, March 4, 2009 at 7:30  
Wednesday, March 18, 2009 at 7:30

### Lafayette School District

LAFSD Office  
3477 School Street, Lafayette  
Wednesday, March 18 at 7:00

### Orinda Union School District

OUSD Office  
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda  
Monday, March 9 at 4:00

### Moraga School District

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate  
School Auditorium  
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga  
Tuesday, March 10 at 7:30

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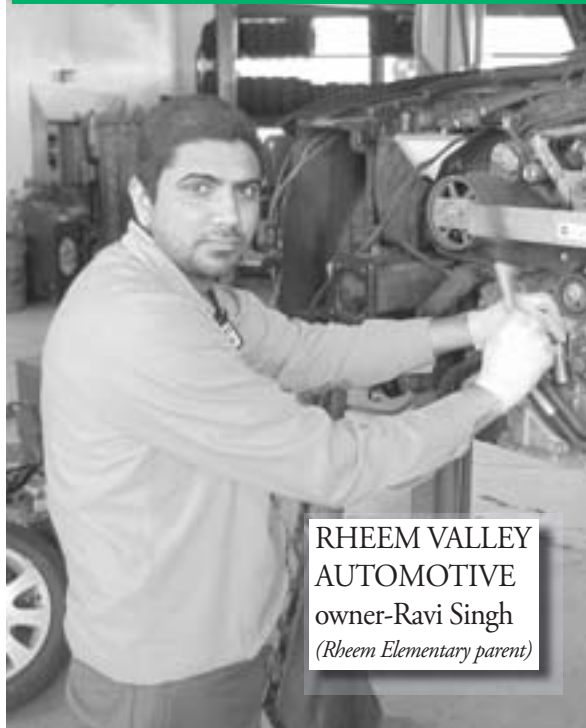
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## The Waiting Game in College Admissions

By Elizabeth A. LaScala, Ph.D.

So you've completed the college essays, ordered your transcripts, and pushed the submit button on your last college application. Now what should you do while you wait for responses? First and foremost, continue to be actively engaged in doing your best academic work. This is critical because colleges review final transcripts to be certain no courses were dropped and grades did not plummet. If something does change, be proactive and communicate directly to the schools with an explanation. This way you may be able to avoid a very unpleasant surprise, like a rescinded admissions decision later in the spring.

This is also a good time to visit schools you were not able to go to see yet. Don't wait for the acceptance letter to visit campuses. The decision deadline, May 1st, arrives soon after acceptance letters—so be prepared. If academic or financial concerns make visiting a campus impossible, continue to familiarize yourself with colleges in other ways. Read blogs, examine course catalogues, review housing considerations, email faculty, students and undergraduate admission counselors in order to make comparisons that will help you make an informed decision. Colleges expect and encourage applicants to research options carefully.

### Do I Need to Choose a Major to Choose a College?

As you wait for responses, it is important to remember that you do not need to declare a major to select a college. If you have applied to schools that are good fits and have programs that meet your interests and needs, you should not have the added pressure to choose a major. In a recent report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, employers who were surveyed identified teamwork, critical thinking and reasoning, and oral and written communication skills as the top competencies they search for in new hires. Rather than focus on a particular major, employers identified five areas to acquire

proficiency:

- Learning to think critically and creatively
- Problem solving
- Developing the ability to speak comfortably to different audiences in different settings
- Thinking about educational aspirations from a global community perspective
- Writing well in every discipline

College advisors are ahead of the curve when they encourage students to apply to institutions where these valuable skills are emphasized during all four undergraduate years.

### Writing Well Should Be at the Top of Your List

If I were to prioritize the above skills I would start with writing well in every discipline. Good writing requires critical thinking and creativity. When you write, you also practice problem solving, for example when you determine how best to tackle an essay or research paper. Someone who may never be a great speaker can still greatly influence others by writing. Moreover, good writing transfers easily to effective oral presentations. Finally, written words can be translated into any language, so communication, like mathematics, is a universal language.

In my practice I help students improve their writing. Waiting until the college essay needs to be written may be waiting too long. When you write better, grades improve, test scores rise and you turn out better-quality college application essays.

It is important to bear in mind that writing is not an end in itself, but a process that helps you develop your ideas and think creatively, critically and logically. Here are some tips:

1. Start with an outline. You've heard it a thousand times, but here it is again. An outline helps you to stay on course, identify main points, and make a strong conclusion.

2. Write more than one draft. As you write you may discover that one of your last paragraphs is your best or that you've

changed your point of view. That means writing helped you think through your thoughts and refine them. This is part of effective writing! Take the time to rewrite your outline and get yourself on track with your new focus.

3. Keep your audience and assignment in mind. For example, avoid book report summaries, when your teacher asks for an analysis. Remember your teacher has read the book!

4. Proofread. Take a break, and return to your work with fresh eyes. Make sure your writing is clear, well supported and makes sense when you read it aloud.

Writing takes time and practice. Allow sufficient time to show your draft to others, like a trusted peer who understands the assignment. Perhaps your teacher is willing to look over your draft. A new perspective can help you polish your writing. A final word: what you read influences how you write. Your reading material becomes a teacher. Keep this in mind when you choose between a popular book you can breeze through and a more challenging novel.



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.

# Lamorinda Schools

## High School Girls Talk about Their Middle School Years

By Sophie Braccini

Parents came in large numbers to Orinda Intermediate School on the evening of February 18th to hear a panel of high school girls discuss "the truth about middle school girls." The bulk of their questions ranged from self-esteem, to friend trouble, adaptation to change, the truth about boys and the real high school scene.

The eight students who comprised the panel came from Acalanes, Campolindo, Las Lomas and Miramonte. They are part of the group of girls who will lead the "Sister-to-Sister" summit in March and they have been in training for the summit for the past six months with the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

Middle school is a trying time for girls who want to fit in while everything changes: their bodies, their school, their friends (who sometimes turn against them) and boys (who are entering the picture). It was reassuring for anxious parents to see and talk to 8 diverse and well-adjusted girls who had been through the middle school ordeal and could offer some perspective on what the future holds.

After a short presentation in which the students introduced themselves and evoked briefly their worst and best experience in middle school, Ksenija Olmer, the moderator from AAUW, asked the questions that parents had written on cards.

The first questions addressed survival tips and the boosting of self-esteem. "Branch out, meet new people," recommended Acalanes' Sarah Gilson; "be yourself and don't give in to peer pressure," said Miramonte's Shalini Majumdar; "surround yourself with people who make you feel good about yourself," added Acalanes' Anna Eames. The positive aspect of meeting new people and finding the right group of friends was a theme that came back many times during the evening.

When asked what the girls

would change if they could go back to middle school, Las Lomas' Katherine Holzheimer said, "I wish I would have branched out more, rather than staying in my same group of friends," while classmate Jett Gendron added, "I wish I had known that I wasn't alone, that other girls felt like me." Eames said she wished she had known about the Sister-to-Sister summit that AAUW organizes for that purpose, helping middle school girls connect to each other and recognize they are not alone.

Underneath the confident image the panel presented to the crowd, sometimes sadness related to a middle school experience resurfaced. Campolindo's Sarah Mohammed recalled a hurtful event when some of her best friends suddenly turned against her. She recommended that middle school girls be reminded that things change and only get better.

Finding that right group of people is a key to high school happiness, according to the students, and they added that the fluidity between groups lessens the clique problems. "The lines are blurred," said Campolindo's Danielle Booth, "everyone travels between groups."

"Sports help a lot," added Majumdar. The positive impact of participating in sports came back many times for issues as different as friendships and body image. Answering a question from the parent of a very short 6th grader, Holzheimer said, "we have a 4'11" player on our soccer team, she is ferocious, that's who she is and she embraces it."

The concept of being true to yourself and not worrying so much about what others are thinking appeared to be one of the benefits of growing up: "I wish I had known there was not only one behavior, or only one style of shoes that were acceptable," said Gilson. Mohammed remembered being very concerned about what others were thinking about her appearance and behavior.

Parents' questions shifted

to issues regarding boys and sexual behaviors in middle school and beyond. The high school students dismissed almost completely the allegation of promiscuity in middle school. "The biggest deal would be to hold hands," said Booth "and I never felt any pressure about becoming more active." They generally admitted that dating in middle school was more about fitting in than real feelings.

The girls confirmed that in high school the level of sexual activity was much higher, but they all reported having never felt pressured into anything.

Same thing with alcohol and drugs, "it all depends who you hang out with, and it's easy to stay away from it if you want to," said Gendron. They all added that being able to call their parents in sticky situations had been a safety net.

All of the girls acknowledged that open communication with both their parents helped them navigate the middle and high school scenes. "My dad helped me vent," said Gilson, "I always had open communication with my mom," added Booth.

At the end of the evening, parents enthusiastically applauded the panel. "What a great group of young women," said Carol Shenon, the mother of a 6th grade girl, "they really expressed what it was like to be in middle school and gave us a perspective about what to look forward to." Shenon was impressed by the maturity and the long way the girls seem to have gone within just a few years.

"The benefit of that experience is what we want the middle school girls to get during the Sister-to-Sister summit," said Olmer, "it creates a bridge and a perspective for the younger ones, during a day that's divided between fun activities and group discussions."

The Sister-to-Sister summit will be held at OIS on March 7th from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Pre-registration is required, call (925) 942-0102.

## Acalanes Wins

### Contra Costa County's 2009 Academic Decathlon

Submitted by Jonathan B. Lance



Photo submitted by Diane Morrell, Contra Costa County Office of Education

Acalanes High School was announced as the overall team winner of the 2009 Contra Costa County Academic Decathlon. This is Acalanes' third year in a row as the County's team winner. The top high school teams that followed Acalanes were (in order) Campolindo, Miramonte and Monte Vista in Danville.

The Academic Decathlon was directed by the Contra Costa County Office of Education with the assistance of community volunteers. The Academic Decathlon provides an opportunity for high school students to compete as individuals and teams in a series of ten academic tests and demonstrations including: art, economics,

language and literature, mathematics, music, science, essay, interview, and speech (both prepared and impromptu). The curriculum for this year's test was Latin America with a Focus on Mexico. Acalanes High School will represent Contra Costa County at the California Academic Decathlon that will be held in Sacramento March 14-16. The National Academic Decathlon will be held in Memphis, Tennessee May 22-25. "The Academic Decathlon is a wonderful event for our high school students," said Contra Costa County Superintendent of Schools Joseph A. Ovick, Ed.D. "My congratulations to all the schools and students who partici-

pated, and a big thank you to all the teachers and volunteers who made the event a booming success. Best wishes to Acalanes High School team as they advance to the state level competition," continued Ovick.

The high school teams are made up of nine students, grades 9-12, with a maximum of three students in each of the following divisions: Honors (3.75-4.00 GPA), Scholastic (3.00-3.74 GPA) and Varsity (2.99 GPA and below). For the complete team and individual scores of the 2009 Contra Costa County Academic Decathlon, visit [www.cocoschools.org/edsvcs/events/decathlon.htm](http://www.cocoschools.org/edsvcs/events/decathlon.htm).

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