

SCHOOL CALENDAR

School Governing Board Meetings

Acalanes Union

High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, March 18, 2009 at 7:30
Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 7:30

Lafayette School District

LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, March 18 at 7:00
Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 7:00

Moraga School District

Joaquin Moraga Intermediate
School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, April 14 at 7:30

Orinda Union School District

OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, April 13 at 4:00

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Budget Cuts Prompt Pink Slip Protests

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"I am not comfortable budgeting for a revenue source that could be unreliable," stated Chris Learned, AUHSD Assistant Superintendent of Business Services. "We are going to have to be very careful moving forward."

Learned fully expects the numbers will change by the time the budget is adopted in the summer. In addition to the State budget's reliance on the outcome of the May election, the State's dreary economic picture and flagging revenues may yield further school funding reductions at the May Budget Revise, ironically scheduled for June 2.

Although the financial picture is likely to continue to change, Lamorinda school administrators now have a much clearer idea of the challenges they face. After managing their district budgets without a state budget for the first eight months of the current school fiscal year (which runs from July 1 through June 30), the budget analysts for AUHSD, MSD, and Orinda Union School District (OUSD) each presented a three-year fiscal projection at their early March Governing Board meetings.

The three-year budget report for the Lafayette School District (LAFSD) will be presented at their upcoming meeting on March 18.

Breakdown by District

AUHSD.

Reduced State funds for the current school year created a \$1.4 million problem for the high school district, which they can manage with reserves. "Having those reserves enabled us to survive midyear cuts of this magnitude," reported Learned. The District is facing a shortfall of \$3.9 million for the 2009-2010 school year. Although over 57 personnel will receive layoffs notices, Learned anticipates that number will drop when the contributions of the education foundations and parent clubs are factored in. AUHSD's current parcel tax, which contributes \$7 million to the general fund, will expire in June, 2011. The AUHSD Governing Board decided not to place a parcel tax proposition on the June, 2009 ballot; discussions regarding renewing the parcel tax are ongoing.

MSD.

Increased flexibility in the use of categorical funds from the State will enable MSD to offset about \$500,000 in funding reductions in the current school year reported Superintendent Rick Schafer. However, given the size of the State funding reductions going forward, Schafer said, "If we keep spending at the same level, we'll be in the hole in two years." To avoid depleting reserves and deficit spending, the MSD Board approved a list of recommended budget reductions, enhancements, and transfers along with the use of up to \$300,000 in reserves for the 2009-10 school year.

OUSD.

Orinda's K-8 district will use reserves to address the \$708,000 deficit facing the District this year. The Governing Board has approved a prioritized list of personnel and program cuts to go into effect in the next school year. A recently passed parcel tax will bring an additional \$870,000 in to the District coffers each year, but these revenues have yet to be accumulated or allocated.

LAFSD.

According to Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill, the LAFSD was able to weather the 2008-09 State funding shortfall due to a variety of factors. The District had budgeted for increased employee health care costs, and remarkably their rates were not raised. While enrollment was projected to decline, the District actually grew by 35 students. In addition, the District received a generous contribution from the parents' clubs and the education foundation. The Governing Board has approved an expense reduction plan for the 2009-10 school year. Dr. Brill noted that five retirements have enabled the District to avoid some layoffs.

Family Focus

Parent Regrets

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

Thanks for writing to share your regrets about your parenting experiences. It can be helpful to hear how others have handled their problems and how they would do things differently. As much as we might like to be perfect parents, we all make our share of judgments and mistakes.

I went through a very ugly divorce, and my deepest regret is that I did not shield my children from it in the way I should have. I believed that honesty was the best policy, and I answered all of their questions as truthfully as I could. I did not tell them everything, of course, but now I know that I told them too much (especially the older one). We all try to do what we think is best, and sometimes even our best doesn't seem to be good enough. Circumstances can evolve beyond our control. I had an older brother who told me, as I was beginning to think about divorce and worrying about how it would affect my kids, "A kid's got to play the hand he's dealt," and that I had to do what I needed to do. As it turned out, although he didn't know it at the time, my brother would die of cancer a couple of years later, leaving a young son behind. I hold on to this advice at those times when I'm forced to accept that which I can't change, but I see that my children were deeply affected by the divorce trauma and probably will be for a very long time.

Anonymous

One regret I have is that I didn't make my daughter stick with her piano lessons. She took lessons for five years and did very well. But during the fifth year she started complaining about having to practice, and my husband

and I decided to let her take a break. She never went back to it and recently told me how she wishes she had kept it up.

Kathy Grant

I have three wonderful children, but I regret having them so close together, all within five years. We can't enjoy our children as much as we'd like because life is such a constant whirlwind of activity. I feel stressed and overwhelmed much of the time, and I worry about not being a good wife and mother. If we had spaced our children better we could have more time to give to each child and ourselves.

Anonymous

I have one regret as a parent of three boys: not teaching them how to cook! Now that they are in college and two have a kitchen, this would have been very helpful to them.

Frances Montalvo Palacios

My biggest regret is that I have to work full-time while we are raising our kids. I didn't expect this would be the case when we moved to California several years ago. Unfortunately the nature of my job requires a full work week, and we need my additional income to live in this area so that our kids can go to good schools and grow up in a safe environment. But it breaks my heart sometimes when I can't participate in their activities during the day or have enough energy for them at night.

Anonymous

Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. She can be reached at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com

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Lamorinda Schools

Acalanes Students Send Books to Prisoners

By Jean Follmer



Acalanes Junior Rachel Whittom stops to read a letter from a prisoner who requested a book from the Prisoner Literature Project in Berkeley
Photo provided

A number of Acalanes juniors recently filled some of their required community service hours reading letters from and sending books to prisoners incarcerated throughout the United States. The students engaged in the volunteer activity at the Prisoner Literature Project (PLP) in Berkeley, which began as a grassroots organization in Bound Together Books on Haight Street in San Francisco in the early 1980s. It still operates

entirely as a volunteer organization.

Many prisoners throughout the United States do not have access to books beyond those that are available in the prison libraries. They are only able to receive books from pre-approved sources. PLP is one of them.

Gina Shepard of PLP said, "Some prisons don't allow books at all." She indicated that getting books often involves a power struggle

with the prison guards.

Acalanes Junior Class Secretary Rachel Whittom learned about PLP and got in touch with Shepard. Junior Lindsay Cope said, "We wanted to find an organization that would provide a unique opportunity for community service."

Whittom said the experience was very rewarding for the students. "I really enjoyed this program. I thought it was really beneficial because the prisoners are trying to get better and improve their life when they get out of prison," she said. "I thought about it after we were done and I really think we did something that made a difference."

Cope agreed with Whittom. "I think, overall, it was really eye-opening to read such personal accounts from the letters, and by sending books to each recipient we actually made a huge difference," she said. "It's amazing to know that the books and letters you send will bring hope to people who need it the most."

Shepard said the prisoners generally learn about PLP through advertisements in prison publications and flyers. The prisoners send letters to PLP requesting books that are not available at their detention facility. Some request specific books and others request books on a specific topic. PLP has recently become a popular community service venue for high school students. "Lately we've mostly been having student volunteers," said Shepard.

For more information, visit <http://www.prisonersliteratureproject.com/>.

Schools Celebrate Reading Seuss Style

By T.R. Audley



Sleepy Hollow School second graders ready to read

Photo Trina Audley

For elementary students in Lamorinda, the first week of March brought a birthday celebration. Instead of cake, however, students devoured books. Party favors came in the form of funny words and fond memories.

Special guest readers and other once-a-year events marked the National Education Association's (NEA) twelfth annual Read Across America Day celebrated on or near March 2, the birthday of Theodor Seuss Geisel. Better known as "Dr. Seuss," Geisel revolutionized the early reader experience with colorful illustrations and rhythmic, rhyming stories.

Designed to foster reading enthusiasm, the NEA calls for "every child in America to be reading in the company of a caring adult." Many Lamorinda elementary schools chose community and educational leaders to visit classrooms and read. Other schools celebrated with pajama days, read-a-thons, parent-child book club meetings, special assemblies and, of course, green eggs and ham for breakfast.

At Burton Valley and Springhill Schools in Lafayette, guest readers included Superintendent of Schools, Fred Brill, and other school board members. Two superior court judges, Police Chief Mike Hubbard, and veterinarian Dr. Pam Wittenberg visited Burton Valley, said Reading Specialist Mette Thallaugh, as well as cheerleaders and athletes from UC Berkeley and

Saint Mary's College, and Clifford the Big Red Dog. Springhill's Reading Specialist Jill Tarkoff included Congressman George Miller and local fire fighters to their reader roster.

Principals, librarians and reading specialists also topped guest reader lists at many schools; two of Lafayette School reader annual favorites are Music Director Susan Comber and Head Custodian Dave D'Angelo. "You have to hear Dave pour on his New Jersey accent when he reads *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*," reported Reading Specialist Carol Harris.

Stanley Middle School Principal David Shrag read to Lafayette School fifth graders to help calm middle school transition jitters, while other fifth graders and parents culminated their study of Christopher Paul Curtis' Newberry award winner *Bud, Not Buddy* at the annual parent/child book club meeting hosted by teacher Scott Moe.

Some schools simplified celebrations, focusing on early readers in lower grades. At Los Perales and Rheem in Moraga, kindergartners enjoyed Seuss books such as *Cat in the Hat* which employs only 220 site words that they can read. Camino Pablo third grade classes also enjoyed reading Seuss for the day. At many schools, upper grade students became special readers as well, visiting their school "buddies" in the lower grades to present personalized book choices.

Traditional school-wide cele-

brations also served to make the week memorable. At Sleepy Hollow School, teacher Kay Aacker helped guide second graders who, in handmade trademark Seuss hats, led a school assembly to teach "Who Was Seuss?" Also in Orinda, Del Rey School Librarian Lisa Michaels posted an eight-foot-long list of Seuss books where students could mark their favorite. Colorful graphs displayed results at the week's end.

As a finale, Lafayette School PTA board members prepared their annual Green Eggs and Ham breakfast for over 400 parents and students. The Cat in the Hat came to life at breakfast to greet families.

(Rumor is he cleaned his plate.)



Cat in the Hat with kindergartener Lena Johnson

Photo Trina Audley