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From Front Page

Lamorinda School Districts Embrace Curriculum Change

... continued from page A1

In the spring of 2009, governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia committed to developing a common core set of standards that would help prepare all students for success in college and career. The purpose is to harmonize learning across the country and make sure the students will be ready to compete globally. The standards affect English language arts and mathematics.

Lafayette School District assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction Rachel Zinn says that the changes started in Lafayette seven years ago, well before the common core standards were adopted. "We have been researching best practices all over the country and implementing changes over the past seven years," she says. "A lot of the things we've been doing are aligned with the common core. It is about going deeply into reading and writing and math." She says that the district looked for strategies that showed results.

One study by Ellin Oliver Keene researched how adults navigated difficult texts. From her findings, seven strategies were created that can be taught to students to comprehend and navigate texts. "This is a lot of what the common core is about," says Zinn. After Lafayette identified the best practices, a significant investment was made to train its teachers and support class implementation.

"We have a math coach, Andy Schipper, who's been helping facilitate many meetings with grade level teams," she adds. The district also has a literacy coach who works with grade level teams and provides support for understanding the standards. "It comes with a price tag, but our community of parents and founda-

tions is extremely generous," says Zinn. "We also took advantage of federal Title II funds."

In Moraga, the change started last year with modification of the math curriculum; and Orinda has set a strategic plan in place to gradually implement the required changes.

Moraga and Orinda are also working in grade level teams.

"The teachers worked in groups at each grade level with a teacher leader," explains Guinn. "Staff meetings were dedicated to common core topics, identifying standards, putting together lessons and sharing their assessments." Two years ago, her district provided information to teachers and began training.

"The standards are now an inch wide and a mile deep," says Guinn. "For example in math, the challenge comes from not only giving the correct answers to problems, but explaining why and how that answer was found."

Camino Pablo Elementary School third grade teacher Barbara Elliott, who will continue the implementation this year, says the children have loved the lessons. "It is more hands on and fun," she says. "With the new standard, we do not give the rules and results to the kids; they have to figure it out themselves. A lot of the activities are done in groups and they love it."

She believes that this method also allows students with different learning styles to come up with new ways to solve problems and that it improves children's capabilities to think critically.

This year the district continues to implement the math standard as well as English language arts. "With the new standards comes a different type of assessment," says Guinn. "The Star testing we know now will end in 2014

and will be replaced by the Smarter Balance Assessment."

She explains that those tests are designed to be taken online. There will still be some multiple choice tests, plus something called constructive response. "In the course of two days students in collaborative groups of up to four will work together on a topic, divide the research into the pieces, then each student will construct their own response," she says. "This is much different than what students have been asked to do. They will also have to explain their reasoning and rationale."

This new testing requires investment in terms of equipment as well, and requires serious financial planning for each district. In Orinda, staff has been strategically setting priorities and looking at system-wide upgrades in technology in preparation for the change. Strategic planning is also being used in Orinda to train teachers and gradually implement the change in the curriculum.

"We began raising awareness last year," says Kathy Marshall, OUSD director of curriculum and instruction, "and have defined a road map for implementation over a three year period."

Orinda's school district has included a parent education component to its plan, so they know what is going on in the classroom and how to better support their children at home.

"Each year we assess our progress and make adjustments along the way," adds Marshall, who believes that the direction OUSD has been taking - building the foundation to support thinking critically, and supporting the teachers who are working together across the district - has prepared them well to embrace the new standards.

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Construction Zone: Road Hazards Ahead

... continued from page A1

Alfred is a traffic technician for Bay Area Traffic Solutions. A flagger for over two years, he was recently stationed along Olympic Boulevard. "Ninety percent [of the drivers] obey you," he said. He wishes drivers would be "more aware" of their surroundings, and indicated the three sets of orange warning signs leading up to the cone zone. "It never dies down," he said of the traffic flow.

"Without us here drivers would be going 40 to 45 miles per hour," he said. "I tell people, 'Imagine if that was your daughter or son [trying to cross the street],'" adding, "You have to have a lot of patience for this job." Two hundred feet down the road, Alfred's coworker Terrance was in radio contact. Although "most [drivers] respect the traffic zone," Terrance had seen both excessive speeding and an "awful lot" of unlawful automobile cell phone use, he said.

Last year, police wrote out hundreds of speeding and cell phone violation tickets.

Asked about construction zone driving, Moraga police chief Robert Priebe cited California Vehicle Code section 22362, which deals with operating a vehicle in excess of the

posted speed limit along a highway. Locally, Priebe said "all drivers need to be aware of their obligations to drive safely at all times, and to be alert to changing speed limits and the possibilities associated with persons and equipment in construction zones."

California Department of Motor Vehicles posts information on the regulation of traffic in a construction zone online at www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/hdbk/shr_ped_work.htm and the California Department of Transportation developed its Slow for the Cone Zone campaign which is detailed below and at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/maint/workzone.



Work Zone Safety Tips

- Do not speed in work zones; obey the posted speed limits.
 - Stay alert! Expect the unexpected.
 - Watch for workers; drive with caution.
 - Don't change lanes unnecessarily.
 - Avoid using mobile phones while driving in work zones.
 - Turn on headlights so that workers and other drivers can see you.
 - Be especially alert at night while driving in work zones.
 - Expect delays, especially during peak travel times.
 - Allow ample space between you and the car in front of you.
 - Anticipate lane shifts, and merge when directed to do so.
 - Be patient!
- Source: California Department of Transportation

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