

# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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From left: Jamie, Scout and Finn Renton are working hard to bring in restrictions on gas-powered leaf blowers.

Photo Pippa Fisher

## Young activists push to pull plug on gas leaf blowers

By Pippa Fisher

Three young Lafayette residents are fed up with noisy, polluting gas-powered leaf blowers. And they are doing something about it.

For 12-year-old Finn and his 10-year-old twin sisters, Scout and Jamie Renton, the tipping point came over the past months of remote learning as they struggled to hear their teachers on Zoom over

the noise from leaf blowers in the neighborhood. "We got interested in it because mostly everyone is at home because of COVID so we realized how much people use leaf blowers," explains Scout. "We decided to do some research and we found out how bad they are and decided to try and stop them from polluting the environment."

They definitely did their research and sent their findings to the city council, along with a letter dated Jan. 13 asking for action.

"Would you consider letting a pickup truck idle in your driveway with its tailpipe aimed at your open windows for three hours each week?" asked the kids in the letter to council, continuing, "If a gas leaf blower is being used in your yard, that's approximately the amount of pollutants that are entering your home environment for every 15 minutes of use."

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## Districts move quickly to enable schools to reopen ASAP



Photo Jennifer Wake

By Sora O'Doherty

Even as it protested against new requirements imposed by the governor on schools to reopen, the Orinda Union School District moved swiftly to comply. Moraga and Lafayette school districts did the

same, holding several special meetings, with superintendents completing the required COVID-19 Safety Plan (CSP) and the COVID-19 Prevention Plan (CPP) and submitting them prior to a Feb. 1 state deadline.

District boards planned special meetings on Feb. 2 (after press time) to vote on instructional schedules.

OUSD Superintendent Carolyn Seaton explained at the Jan. 28 OUSD special meeting that the first day possible for elementary schools to reopen is Feb. 9, since there is no school on Mondays. This is due to the county's requirement that there are at least five consecutive days where the adjusted case rate is 25 or fewer per 100,000 of population. On Jan. 28 the ACR in the county was 34.2 per 100,000 but was showing signs of trending downward.

At its Jan. 29 special board meeting, MSD Superintendent Bruce Burns said elementary schools could reopen in early February, "but it's a remote possibility. Rates are continuing to decline," he said, "but not as quickly as needed."

The OUSD board of directors on Jan. 28 discussed extensively the reopening of schools in the district, approved the letter protesting the new requirements, and adopted a resolution seeking prioritization of COVID-19 vaccinations for teachers and school staff. It was announced that new memoranda of understanding have been agreed with both

unions, the one that represents teachers and the one that represents classified employees.

There was a fervent determination not to miss another opportunity to reopen Orinda schools among the board members and many public speakers. Board member Carol Brown said, "We have looked back a few times, we regretted not opening during the one week we could have opened." Some teachers, however, still object to a return to the classroom with students before being vaccinated.

Orinda Intermediate School teacher Bobby Glasser said that he was prohibited from returning to the classroom if he failed a test for tuberculosis, which accounted for 542 deaths in the United States in 2018, while he is being asked to go back into the classroom without vaccination against a disease that has killed over 400,000 in the country. All speakers, board members and public, expressed the desire to have school personnel vaccinated as soon as possible.

The OUSD board also heard reports of how hard teachers and staff have been working, and how complex it will be to move from fully distance learning to the hybrid model approved by the board.

Bobby Bardenham, OUSD Director of Technology, said, "My team is exhausted; this is close to killing us." He added, "I have a lot of knowledge and most of this will fall on me." ... continued on Page A7

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