



La Cañada Unified

September 2005

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Message from the Superintendent

by Jim Stratton, Superintendent



The purpose of this new district newsletter is to communicate important information regarding all aspects of the La Cañada Unified School District. We want to share news regarding academics, assessment, budget, personnel, facilities, safety, extracurricular enrichment, athletics—everything that impacts and shapes the district. To make the scope of coverage as wide as possible, various staff members will be taking turns writing updates in future issues about their specific areas of focus.

Strengthening communication and accessibility is one of our three primary goals this year. This means frequent school visits by the superintendent to observe classrooms and attend staff meetings; strong follow-up by staff members to parent questions and concerns; easy accessibility of administrators and teachers to parents and students; and productive collaboration between staff, student and parents to solve problems. Implementation of this goal will come in various ways. A major example will be the formation of a district budget advisory committee (composed of teachers, administrators, classified staff, parents and a Governing Board representative) to study how state funding impacts LCUSD and how to make our funding work most effectively for us. A more immediate example is our recent implementation of feedback postcards for parents to complete each time they meet with an administrator. The aim here is to determine whether parents have easy access to administrators, whether their questions are clearly addressed and whether they understand what follow-up will occur. Results for the cards will help us to improve service.

Our second major goal is to review our educational program and our support operations. We plan to reflect on our current practices and compare them with recognized “best practices” in the field to decide where we can adjust, improve, change, supplement and/or revise what we do. For example, we will be looking at remedial instruction, acceleration, block schedule, arts education, service learning, disaster preparedness, nutrition and central purchasing among other topics. The review process will include the following: analysis of data, visits to other districts, discussions among staff, and study of research.

Our third major goal is to ensure that all members of the learning community demonstrate growth and success this year. This goal means providing support for students who may not be achieving standards and also resources for students who want to accelerate or to specialize. It also means providing new and engaging ways for students to develop citizenship and leadership skills. For staff members, this growth goal refers to professional development that is based on individual need and interest.

Throughout the district right now there is a great deal of positive energy. We believe that this year will see an outstanding school district become even better and we look forward to sharing our progress with you in this newsletter.



LC Newsletter

THE NEWSBOARD

By Ron Dietel, Board President



“Curiosity is a delicate little plant, which, aside from stimulation, stands merely in need of freedom.”

-- Albert Einstein

Welcome to the first issue of the LCUSD newsletter that incorporates the former LCUSD Board President’s newsletter. I’ll call this column *The NewsBoard*, sharing information from some of our recent school board meetings.



Negotiations Update: LCUSD is well on its way to finalizing the details of a new contract with the La Cañada Teachers Association. The new agreement will provide certificated employees with a well-deserved cost of living increase while keeping LCUSD financially stable for the 2005-2006 school year. Congratulations to both the District and LCTA negotiating representatives for reaching an agreement in principle as we begin the school year. The agreement is not completed until LCTA membership and the Governing Board votes on and ratifies the agreement, which we hope will be completed by early October.



Budget Approved by County: In August, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, which is charged with approval of all LA County Districts school budgets, approved the LCUSD budget for the 2005-2006 school year. However, they noted that the District had not yet settled its agreement with LCTA. We are confident that the County will approve a revised LCUSD budget with the new LCTA agreement.



Enrollment: Although District enrollment has dropped from the last school year by approximately 29 students, the drop was expected, and in fact less than predicted earlier in 2005. With more than 4200 students in the district, the decline is less than 1% of our total student population. The high quality of our schools continues to bring in new students, despite a steep increase in local home prices.



Facilities Improving: If you have a high school student, you may have heard about the comprehensive renovations to most of the rest rooms on the high school campus. Every school in the District is undergoing improvements, thanks to the community’s generous support of the 2004 and the 1999 school bond, the latter which continues to benefit our schools some seven years after its passage. The District is making every effort to stretch your tax dollars and maximize facilities upgrades at every school.



DID YOU KNOW?

Research confirms a high relationship between attendance and student performance. In a study that examined which students were on track to attend one of the nine University of California (UC) campuses, Kilchan Choi and Edwin Shin (2003) found that attendance was a major factor. Students in the first semester of the eleventh grade were at the greatest risk of dropping their UC eligibility because of excessive absences. Keeping you children in school on every school day, except when they are legitimately sick, contributes to your child’s academic achievement.

New Principals at LCUSD



Our new 9-12 principal at La Canada High School is Dr. Damon Dragos. Dr. Dragos is a recent Ed.D graduate in Administrative Leadership from USC, and comes to La Canada from Sunny Hills High School in the Fullerton High School District. His Bachelor of Arts is in History from Whittier College, and he holds a Masters in Administration/Leadership degree from Azusa Pacific University. Dr. Dragos has also taught for the Claremont Unified and Whittier Union School Districts, and has administrative experience in Burbank and Manhattan Beach Unified School Districts.

Wendy Sinette, previously principal at Palmcrest Elementary (2002-2005) is the new 7-8 principal at La Canada High School. Before coming to LCUSD, Wendy had eight previous years of administrative experience, five of which were as Principal of Holy Angels School in Arcadia. Wendy also has ten years teaching experience in social science at private schools. Wendy holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of California, Los Angeles, a Masters of Arts degree in History from Cal State Los Angeles, and a Masters of Arts in Educational Administration from Pepperdine University.



The new principal at Palm Crest Elementary is Ernesto Leon. Ernesto comes to La Canada from the Santa Monica District where he was also an elementary principal. Ernesto also has had elementary teaching experience in Los Angeles and Oakland Unified School Districts. Ernesto earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from Occidental College, a Masters degree in Language and Literacy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and he also holds an additional Masters of Arts degree in Educational Administration from California State Los Angeles.

Susan Kobilarcsik is the new principal at Foothills School. Susan has been a teacher in La Canada since 1996. Susan came to LCUSD after having taught for nine years in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Susan holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Psychology as well as a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and a Masters degree in Teacher Leadership, all from the University of Minnesota. Susan will be working with Dr. Tamara Jackson in this new assignment, and will also be a Reading Intervention teacher for the District.



Leases: Every year, LCUSD receives approximately one million dollars in lease revenue. As we extend those leases, we are seeking to increase revenue that can be used for instructional purposes. However, the District faces two major expenses at our leased properties, both at Foothills Intermediate School. One is a sewer hook-up, which could cost several million dollars. A more immediate need is the cost of replacing an aging heating system with a known cost of more than one million dollars. The board recently authorized the district funding to proceed with plans for the heating system replacement.



New Budget Committee: Among Superintendent Stratton's new goals is the formation of a District Budget Committee. The "role of this group," says Deputy Superintendent Bill Loose, is to help everyone "understand the California public education funding process in general and LCUSD funding in particular, as well as discuss allocations, priorities, savings, and budget monitoring." The first meeting is scheduled for October 5 and will consist of invited members from the certificated and classified bargaining units, district management, the Governing Board, Foundation, Boosters, and PTA.



Visits to School Sites: This fall, the Governing Board will be visiting a broad spectrum of individual classrooms to gain a deeper knowledge of instructional programs at every school site. The efforts are also intended to enhance communications across the school district.

-- Ron Dietel, Governing Board President



New Teachers Around the District

Foothills School

Suzanne Trulik. Suzanne is one of our new Foothills School instructors who is an alumna with a Bachelor of Arts in Art/Graphics from California State University, Northridge. She is two classes shy of her Masters Degree from National University, and has four years teaching experience from Los Angeles Unified and Pasadena Unified Schools. She was Department Chair during the 1999-2000 School Year and will be co-teaching 6-12 grade students at Foothills School.

Melissa King. Melissa is the other new teacher at Foothills, and she comes to LCUSD following seven years previous teaching experience in Middle School Special Education at The Help Group and Long Beach Unified Schools. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies from San Diego State University as well as a Masters in Special Education from California State University, Dominguez Hills. Melissa has also been the K-8 Principal for 3 years at Village Glen School.

La Cañada Elementary

Jenny Keens. Jenny previously was a paraprofessional for our district before being hired as one of our teachers. This is her first teaching assignment. In her new role, she has accepted the assignment as a fifth grade teacher. Jenny's Bachelor of Arts Degree is in Communication from the University of Southern California.

Marie J. Evelyn. Marie has previously been a substitute teacher for La Cañada Unified prior to being hired full-time as a new fourth grade teacher at La Cañada Elementary. Marie holds a Bachelor of Arts in Film Production from Loyola Marymount University, and plays lacrosse for Los Angeles Club Team.

Stacey Carr. Stacey is La Cañada Elementary's new counselor. She has three years counseling experience in Lakewood, Washington, and has lived in Berlin, Germany for three years. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Literature Writing and Masters in Teaching from Evergreen State College, and her hobbies include horses, traveling, food and swimming.

Caroline Chai. Caroline is a brand new fifth grade teacher at LCE, and she recently completed her student teaching at Ranchito Elementary and Burbank Blvd. Elementary Schools in LAUSD in Kindergarten and Fifth Grade. Caroline holds a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies from California State University, Fullerton, and spent one year in Seoul, Korea in an international program and received a diploma for cultural studies.

Robert Chacon. Robert's name may sound familiar to many in our community as he recently has been a local newspaper reporter. Robert has 7 years teaching experience in ESL in Montebello Unified and Sacramento City Unified Schools, and he has a Bachelor of Arts in English from Humboldt State University. Robert will be teaching Spanish at LCE and at Paradise Canyon and journalism at the high school.

Jennifer Bituin. Jennifer is another new teacher, who will be teaching first grade at LCE. She completed her student teaching at Newport Heights in Newport Beach in the fifth grade and also at University Park in Irvine in the second grade. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, Law and Society, with a minor in Education from University of California, Irvine

La Cañada High School

Tracy Clavin. Tracy is the new drama teacher. For the past twelve years she has been teaching drama, dance, communication skills, speech and English at Ramona Convent Secondary School. Her Bachelor of Arts is in Theatre Arts and Rhetoric from Occidental College. Pending the completion of her thesis, she will be receiving her Master's Degree in Education from Mt. St. Mary's. She has also studied theatre in England, Ireland and Italy.

Joshua Landerer. Josh is the new ROP Photography teacher at La Cañada High School. His Bachelor of Arts degree is in Industrial Technology from California State University, Los Angeles. He has four years teaching experience in the Simi Valley Unified and has previously worked at La Cañada High School. He is a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers, National Association of Industrial Technology and the California Industrial Technology Educators Association.

Linda Morton. Linda is one of our new High School Counselors. Linda's background includes two years of special education teaching experience at Glendale Unified and four years of ROP Counseling at La Cañada High, Temple City High and Duarte High Schools. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is in Telecommunications and Film from San Diego State University. Her Masters degree is in Marriage and Family Therapy from the Phillips Graduate Institute. She is a member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapist and the American Association of School Counselors.

Jeff Drach. Jeff comes to the high school with four years previous teaching experience at Pasadena High School teaching 8-12 Grade Chemistry and Physical Science, and having been the department chair there. At LCHS, his assignments will include chemistry and physics. Jeff has been the recipient of the Pasadena Education Foundation "Making Teachers Smile" award and miscellaneous grants. He has also coached football for one year, and been a member of the Emergency Medical Staff. His Bachelor of Science degree is in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois, and he holds a Masters Degree in Administration from Point Loma Nazarene University. Jeff also is a member of the National Science Teacher Association.

Sun Choe. Sun is the new Korean teacher for LCHS. This is her first year teaching, and she holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from California State University, Long Beach, and a Masters in Art Education from California State University, Northridge. She is a member of the Fine Art Gallery, and created numerous gallery and museum exhibitions in the US and in Korea.

Kandy Basmajian. Kandy is another High School Counselor. She has seven years previous teaching experience at Glendale Unified and Hanford Unified School Districts. She was nominated for the Disney Teacher of the Year Award in 2005, coached softball to a division team championship in 2001, and appeared in the Game show "Who Knows You Best" in 2000. Her Bachelor of Arts is in Psychology, and her Masters Degree is in Education and Counseling from Fresno State University. She is a member of the American Counseling Association.

Leslie Martin. Leslie is a new High School Speech Therapist. Her Bachelors and Masters degrees are in Communicative Disorders from California State University, Northridge. She is member of the American Speech and Language Association, California Speech and Hearing Association, and a California State University Board Member for Communicative Disorders.

Walt Foreman. Walt is a new music teacher for LCHS. He has two years teaching experience at Pasadena Unified School District. His Bachelor of Science degree is in Instrumental Music from the Tennessee Technological University. He also has a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from John Hopkins University, and a second Masters Degree in Fine Arts from the University of Southern California. He has published a novel in April 2003, and he had two short films in the Los Angeles Short Film Festival held September 6-13, 2005.

Robert Chacon. Robert is teaching journalism at LCHS. Please see the earlier biography about him listed above for additional information.

Cole Spittler. Cole will be teaching Spanish long-term through November 10th for one of our teachers who is currently on maternity leave. He has seventeen years experience teaching Spanish, English, Speech and Acting at Glendale Unified, as well as teaching experience in Michigan and Kentucky. His Bachelors Degree is in English and Spanish from Central Michigan University. His Master's Degree is in English from Central Michigan University, and he also holds a second Master's Degree in Spanish from the University of Northern Iowa.

Palm Crest Elementary

Megan Kirkendoll (Also at Paradise Canyon Elementary). Megan will be a psychologist at Palmcrest and at Paradise Canyon elementary schools. She has 3 years teaching experience teaching third and fourth grade in the Glendale Unified School District. Her Bachelor of Arts Degree is in Psychology from the University of Southern California, and her Masters Degree is in Counseling from California State University, Los Angeles. She is a member of the California Association of School Psychologists. Megan has announced that she will be getting married in June 2006

Erin O'Reilly. Erin will be teaching first grade at Palm Crest Elementary this year. Erin has also been a substitute teacher for our district for two years. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is in Liberal Studies from Mount St. Mary's. She spent 3 weeks this past summer traveling England, Scotland and Ireland, and also spent three weeks traveling in the Philippines. She likes to volunteer her services annually during the summer for the Sacred Heart Girls sleep away camp in Big Bear.

Tara Georgenes. Tara will be doing a long-term assignment in the second grade at Palm Crest Elementary. She performed her student teaching at Fullbright Avenue Elementary in Canoga Park and at Fair Avenue Elementary in North Hollywood. She has been a basketball and soccer coach, studied and worked in Spain, and Volunteered in the LA Times Reading by Nine Program. Her Bachelor of Science degree is in Film Production from Boston University, and she is a member of the National Council of Teachers in Mathematics.

Alicia Pal. Alicia is a first year teacher with a split assignment, teaching special education and reading intervention at Palm Crest Elementary. She is a certified yoga teacher, graduate of Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School in Pasadena, and has lived in France for two years. She is also an avid surfer. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science/International Relations from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a Master's in Education from National University.



LCUSD Scores High

by *Lindi Dreibelbis Arthur*
 Director of Testing and Evaluations

La Cañada Unified School District students continue to perform among the top students in the state as demonstrated by the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program scores and the Academic Performance Index (API) released recently by the state.

The CAHSEE is given for the first time in the sophomore year. An impressive 99% of La Cañada High School's 10th graders passed both the English-Language Arts and Mathematics portions during the test administration last spring. Students who have not yet passed may take the tests again in their junior and senior years. Passing both portions of the CAHSEE is a new state requirement in order to graduate from a California public high school beginning in the year 2006.

The most important part of the STAR Program is the California Standards Tests (CSTs) because these assessments tell how well students are performing as measured against the state content standards. These tests assess what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level. In the elementary grades, between 81% and 94% of students are meeting or exceeding the state target for English-Language Arts (ELA) in each grade level. Scores in mathematics are slightly higher at the elementary level with between 87% and 93% of students meeting or exceeding the state targets. The strongest overall LCUSD performance is in fourth grade where 94% of students in ELA and 91% of students in mathematics are meeting or exceeding the state target performance levels.

At the high school level, grades 7-11, La Cañada students scored significantly higher than the state averages in both ELA and mathematics. In almost all grade levels and subjects, La Cañada had approximately 40% more students scoring in the proficient and advanced categories than the statewide averages. The performance in seventh grade math shows the greatest difference. In seventh grade, 37% of students statewide meet or exceed the performance targets compared to 86% of La Cañada's students.

2005 California Standards Test, English-Language Arts (ELA)
 Percent Meeting or Exceeding State Target, Proficient and Advanced Levels

	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
LCUSD	84	81	94	88	83	86	81	84	79	74
Statewide	42	31	47	43	38	43	39	43	36	36

2005 California Standards Test, Mathematics
 Percent Meeting or Exceeding State Target, Proficient and Advanced Levels

	2nd	3rd	4th	Gen 5th	6th	7th	HS Math	Alg1	Geom.	Alg2	Math
LCUSD	87	93	91	92	87	86	69	62	65	55	72
Statewide	56	54	50	44	40	37	22	19	26	26	45

Compared to the year 2000, student test scores in ELA have improved between 3% and 18% in every grade level, kindergarten through 10th grade. The district has also seen improvement in math scores in second through eighth grades since 2002 with the strongest growth being 14% in seventh grade.



For More Info:

Access State, County, District, and School financial, demographic, and performance data at the following website:

<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>

The California Department of Education also has a website where you can learn more about various standardized tests and assessments such as STAR, API, AYP, and CAHSEE.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/>

State Content Standards which define the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students should acquire at each grade level can be downloaded at

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>



The second component of the STAR Program is the California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6). Although less significant in the state's school accountability measures and not aligned with the California content standards, this basic skills test is used to compare how California students are doing in relation to students of the same grade level nationwide. In the 2004-2005 school year, these tests were only given to third and seventh graders. Scores for this assessment are given in National Percentile Ranks. The LCUSD scores for reading, language, mathematics and spelling on this assessment ranged from 74 to 86. Mathematics was the highest score for both grade levels at 86. A score of 50 is considered "average."



Another important indicator of school performance is the Academic Performance Index. For the first time all La Cañada Unified schools reached 900 or above. The state target is 800. Since 2004, all schools and the overall district calculation have shown improvement.

2005 Academic Performance Index

School Site	2004 API	2005 API	Growth
La Cañada Elementary	953	960	+7
Palm Crest Elementary	923	935	+12
Paradise Canyon Elementary	923	940	+17
La Cañada High School	890	900	+10
La Cañada Unified	906	918	+12

The API is the most important measure of accountability for California public schools. From these base scores, the state develops statewide rankings of all schools and releases that information in the spring.

It is a combined effort of the staff, teachers, administrators, students, parents and community that contribute to the district's high performance. Making all students successful will continue to be our goal. The district will continue to look carefully to identify gaps and find ways to help all students do their best.



New District Budget Committee

*By William Loose,
Deputy Superintendent, Business & Human Resources*

We are proud to announce that the District will have a new group of staff and community members meeting during the course of the year who will be meeting to discuss the public education funding process in general and LCUSD funding in particular.

The committee will consist of representatives from the certificated and classified bargaining units, management, Board of Education, Foundation, Boosters, and PTA. The total expected number of participants is eleven people. The Superintendent will also be discussing budget priorities and budget monitoring with this advisory group.

It is projected that this group will meet roughly on a quarterly basis on the following dates:

Wednesday – October 5, 2005, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. – District Office

Wednesday - January 25, 2006, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. location to be announced

Wednesday – May 24, 2006, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. location to be announced

Future editions of this newsletter will update you regarding the developments of this committee.



Technology Update

By Enoch Kwok,
Director of Technology

We are excited about a new school year after a busy summer reimagining computers in all of the computer labs around the district as well as the classroom computers at the high school. The re-imagining process allows us to update the computers with the latest software security patches and in essence, gives the user a clean slate which should allow computers to run faster, more securely, and with fewer glitches. Additionally, we updated the Groupwise email system and the GWAVA anti-spam software so that both would provide better service while improving their efficiency in keeping out unwanted and virus laden emails.

LCCHS has hired Reda Hanna as a new part-time computer support technician (six hours a day) who will be based exclusively at the high school. Reda will focus his attention on managing and helping teachers with the Pinnacle Gradebook program and the Ektron web content management system as well as providing computer troubleshooting and repair services. Teachers at the high school are encouraged to set up appointments with Reda during their prep periods or after school for small group or personalized attention. Patrick Generosa, our other computer support technician, will continue to help out at the high school but will devote more of his attention to the elementary schools and the district office.

Our technology focus this year will be twofold. First, we will begin implementing the new district technology master plan which was approved last spring. The technology plan's main goal is to improve the integration of technology into the teaching and learning process through the creation of technology infused lessons that are aligned to state curriculum standards and frameworks. Secondly, the technology department will be rebuilding the core of the district's network and adding a new district wide voice mail system when it moves the district office to its new location in the fall/winter timeframe. When it is all completed, every teacher and staff in the district will have a voice mail account that can be linked to their email so that they will receive an email notification when a voice mail has been recorded for them.



Helpful Links from the LCUSD website:

LCUSD District Technology Plan:

<http://www.lcusd.net/Technology/index.htm>

LCUSD Calendars:

<http://www.lcusd.net/Calendars/index.htm>

Governing Board Meeting Schedule

<http://www.lcusd.net/SchoolBoard/index.htm>

LCUSD Councils information and schedules

<http://www.lcusd.net/District/councils.htm>



Construction Update

By Dr. Mike Leininger
Assist. Superintendent, Facilities & Operations

Over the summer several projects were completed throughout the district. At LCE, sliding walls were replaced with permanent walls in six pods. These new walls will act as sound barriers for the middle classrooms. Construction included adding doors to access the outside classrooms as well as bulletin boards and white boards.

At the high school, the cafeteria and teacher's lounge were renovated with new paint and floors. The PTA and PTSA purchased new tables for the cafeteria and the outside area. Additionally PTSA is funding a new sound system. We are also near completion of a new energy management system that will run the heating and air conditioning system more efficiently. We also completed the renovation of the student and staff restrooms in "A" building where a majority of the bathrooms are located. Students came back to "new" restrooms on all three floors.

Construction on the new district office also took place this summer with a completion date scheduled for sometime in October. The new offices and board room will allow staff to be located in close proximity as apposed to the current configuration in the "old house."

Projects scheduled for this year include renovating the PCY and PCR multipurpose rooms (starting in January), a new Choral room and elevator (starting in September) at the high school, and a new Instrumental complex (starting in January).



La Cañada Unified
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