



La Cañada Unified

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Message from the Superintendent

by Jim Stratton, Superintendent



A major goal for the La Cañada Unified School District this year is to ensure that every student demonstrates growth and success. Each school will be developing plans that outline the procedures which staff members will follow to set performance benchmarks, to monitor student progress, to provide early prevention strategies, to implement tutorials and interventions and to work collaboratively with parents.

Success looks different for each student and academic performance is influenced by a variety of factors (e.g., verbal aptitude, attention, motivation, physical health, etc.). Additionally, as shown in Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences, all of us possess different learning styles (kinaesthetic, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, naturalist, etc.), and occasionally students are tested in ways that differ greatly from their learning strengths. It is reasonable, however, to assume that all students can achieve expectations that are appropriately established and assessed.

In his book *Failure is Not an Option: Six Principles that Guide Student Achievement in High Performing Schools*, Alan Blankstein says, "Ensuring achievement for all students means having an overarching strategy that encompasses the majority of learners – and then having specific strategies aimed at those who need extra support." Our work this year is to clarify and coordinate those exact strategies.

Organizing our plans will mean answering the following specific questions. What criteria and benchmarks constitute success for all students? What support mechanisms like advisory classes and transition programs (between grade 6-7 and 8-9) are in place for all students? How are struggling or at-risk students identified? How is individual student performance systematically reviewed and by whom? How are interventions and remediation prescribed, implemented and monitored? How are enrichment opportunities planned and developed?

Many components of the plans already exist, and many new programs have already been developed. Our reading intervention in grades K-6, for example, has been completely revised through the addition of a new assessment protocol and a new curriculum. All of our elementary teachers were trained this past summer in the use of the Informal Reading Inventory, an individually administered decoding, fluency and comprehension assessment that accurately identifies a student's reading level. Students' reading levels now are assessed more effectively and students are referred more quickly for help. Similarly, the reading intervention instructors have



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Governing Board Workshop

On October 24, 2006, the LCUSD Governing Board held a workshop – or community forum – to review the District’s athletics program.

Consistent with the our Core Values and committed to open and transparent decision-making with broad community input, the Board has held a series of workshops over the past year covering a range of topics including construction, class size reduction, staff evaluation, student assessment, best practices, substance abuse, and special education.

A number of reforms, policy changes, and/or budget re-priorities have been established as a direct result of these workshops. Specific examples include:

Construction (Dec. 13, 2005)

- o Formalized the creation of the Palm Drive Property Review Committee with two Board members as liaisons
- o Led to the formation of the Design Review Committee consisting of community members with construction, development and design experience to assist staff with value-engineering of project plan designs

Class Size Reduction (Jan. 17, 2006)

- o Return of ninth-grade class size reduction program

Staff Evaluation (Feb. 28, 2006)

- o Commitment to prioritize proper and timely staff evaluations

Student Assessment (Mar. 21, 2006)

- o New Board-level policy with scheduled Board reviews

Substance Abuse (Jun. 6, 2006)

- o Board support of site-initiated character-oriented program for staff and students

Special Education (Jun. 27, 2006)

- o Adoption of staff training programs

Palm Drive Property Review Committee Recommendations (Sep. 12, 2006)

- o Presentation of recommendations to Board.



Helpful Links from the LCUSD website:

Governing Board Meeting Schedule

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

LCUSD Master Calendar:

<http://www.lcusd.net/Cal/>

LCUSD GATE Advisory Council

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

LCUSD Bond Oversight Committee

<http://www.lcusdnet/facilities.htm>

Andrea Terry Receives Golden Apple

The La Cañada Unified School District administrative team has selected Andrea Terry to receive the 2006-07 Golden Apple award. Sponsored by the Association of California School Administrators, the award honors outstanding community leaders throughout the state.

Mrs. Terry is a long-time PTA volunteer, having served as PTA Council President, Palm Crest Elementary PTA President and chartering President of the Foothills School PTA. She has also been a School Site Council member and chair, an Art Docent, a Great Books leader and a director of the La Cañada Educational Foundation.

With a special interest in health and safety issues, Andrea has chaired the Disaster Preparedness Committee at PCR and the Disaster Preparedness, Safety and Special Education Committees at La Cañada High School. In these capacities, she worked with the school district and city to secure crossing guards, crosswalks, improved traffic patterns and a signal in front of the school.

A two-term member of the La Cañada Flintridge Public Safety Commission, Andrea also serves on the La Cañada Volunteer Emergency Response Team.

La Cañada Unified School District Superintendent Jim Stratton called Mrs. Terry "an outstanding school district volunteer who has contributed countless hours to the enrichment, welfare and safety of our students."

Representatives from the ten school districts that comprise Region XV of the Association of California School Administrators will meet at a special breakfast ceremony in February to present the awards.

The athletics workshop included discussion of selection and evaluation of coaches, CIF regulations, training of coaches, summer programs, player eligibility, player award criteria, and program philosophy.

Particular areas of interest to the Board included coaching conflicts of interest and the role of coaches in facilitating the college matriculation process of student-athletes.

As a direct result of the workshop, the high school is in the process of reviewing and establishing new processes, procedures, guidelines, and qualifications related to athletics.

The program's philosophy that includes "opportunities to assist in the development of fellowship and goodwill, to promote self-realization and all-around growth, and to encourage appreciation of the qualities of good citizenship" will not be materially altered.

The Board has emphasized to the site administration the necessity to enforce the new processes, procedures, guidelines and qualifications once established.

Also, the District is in the process of negotiating with the teachers' bargaining unit specific qualifications and job descriptions for coaches.

Finally, the Board has directed staff to resolve the ambiguity in the Joint Use Contract with the City with regards to jurisdiction, facility use, and liability during the summer school season.

La Cañada High School is believed to have the most comprehensive athletics program in the immediate area, including Glendale and Pasadena. Nearly 50% of our students are involved with CIF-sanctioned sports.

The program has been highly successful by nearly all measures. Even so, the site administration, with a nudge from the Board, is seeking to improve the athletic experience for students and their families by taking the measures described above.



State Issues API Scores

La Cañada is the third highest unified school district in the state as measured by the Academic Performance Index (API). For the first time, however, the overall District score showed a decrease of three points from the previous year. The 2006 District API growth score is now 915. All schools continue to score above 900. Possible scores range from 200 to 1000 with 800 being the state target. La Cañada schools have far exceeded the state target since the inception of the API in 1999.

The API, California's accountability system, monitors the academic achievement of all public schools. The results measure academic performance and how much schools are improving in year-to-year academic growth. The API also provides a numeric value from which schools and school districts can be compared. The latest API growth scores are:

La Cañada Unified School District	915
La Cañada Elementary School	965
Palm Crest Elementary School	909
Paradise Canyon Elementary School	923
La Cañada High School	905

The API is developed by a complex calculation based on students' performance on mandated statewide tests in grades two through twelve. These tests include the California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English-language arts, mathematics, history-social science and science. The CSTs are the most heavily weighted component of the API. The results from the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) are also figured in as well as the California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6 Survey). Another test used is the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in English-language arts and mathematics. Beginning in 2006, the NCLB grade eight science and grade ten CST in life science will be introduced into the API scores that will be released in March 2007.

La Cañada Unified students continue to score among the highest in the state. In 2006, between 76% and 91% of students at each grade level met or exceeded the state target in English-language arts. The elementary scores in mathematics are equally strong ranging from 85% to 92% of students in each grade level meeting or exceeding the target. The results of grade four students are especially laudable. Students demonstrated a very strong performance in both English-language arts and mathematics with 91% and 92% of them respectively meeting or exceeded the state goals. The lowest performance this year is found at the high school level in Geometry, Algebra II, Earth Science and Chemistry where a little more than half the students performed at the state target level or above.

At the high school level, enrollment trends in mathematics and science are being evaluated to determine what impact they may have on the percentage proficient and advanced. In some cases, a larger number of students have taken advantage of a more rigorous curriculum than previously. Although the percentage of students meeting the state target may not have increased, there are actually a greater number of students in those categories than in past years. The best example of this trend is in Algebra II. In 2003, 267 students were tested with 54% of the students meeting or exceeding the state target. In 2006, there were 356 tested with 53% meeting the same cut points. Although the percentage of students went down, the number in the two highest performance levels increased by 43 students.

Administrators and teachers are in the process of closely reviewing the latest assessment data to inform instruction. Detailed analysis is taking place looking at the content cluster areas that make up the overall score. Strengths and growth areas have been identified for each grade level, subject, and/or individual student. A thorough understanding of the individual and group assessment results will help better define curricular pathways, instructional strategies and interventions needed to ensure student success in the future. This work will continue to keep La Cañada students' performance among the top in the state.



Assessment Policy

At its September 12, 2006 meeting, the LCUSD Governing Board approved revisions in the policy on student assessment (Board Policy 6162.5). After extensive discussion and input from the parents and teachers in attendance, Governing Board members voted to strengthen the current policy and to add specific procedures and expectations that had previously existed only as guidelines.

Emphasizing that the primary purpose of assessment is to help students, parents and teachers determine mastery of content standards and identify areas for additional emphasis, the policy outlines particular mandates regarding the grading and review of tests.

At the beginning of each school year, teachers are to include with their course outlines information on testing procedures, test return practice and grading scales. Stating that “the board’s desire [is] to encourage the return of appropriate graded assessments,” the policy further provides that teachers who do not send tests home shall submit a written rationale of their procedure to the principal for approval and signature. Governing Board members indicated that they expect the principals not just to sign off perfunctorily but to engage in a meaningful discussion regarding instructional practice.

Teachers who do not send tests home are required at the beginning of the course to distribute sample questions and rubrics to parents and students. Additionally, the policy provides that tests and other assessments shall be graded in a timely manner and reviewed by students and teachers in class. Teachers, as per the policy, are asked to be reasonably available to address test item review with parents and to make sure assessments have been reviewed with students before administering the next similar assessment in an instructional sequence.

Also accompanying the policy is an administrative regulation (AR 6162.5) that staff will utilize in implementing the Governing Board’s intentions. Among the provisions is an inventory form to be created by the principals and completed by teachers which will indicate number and types of assessments generated by each teacher and the methods by which results were communicated to parents and students. Site principals will use data from the inventory forms to report to the Superintendent and the Governing Board each semester on implementation of the Board Policy.

For the full text of BP 6162.5, please check online www.lcusd.net/District/educ_services.htm under LCUSD Homework/Assessment Guidelines.



Reading Intervention

La Canada Unified School District has been providing reading intervention for many years. We have recently analyzed our reading intervention program and have strengthened it at each elementary site. A good reading intervention program includes instruction and practice in phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, language conventions and writing strategies. A strong reading intervention program gives the students additional instruction beyond their regular classroom instructional time. We believe our program is providing the skills necessary for our struggling students to reach their potential in reading.

Last year, a group of LCUSD teachers and administrators analyzed our reading intervention programs, to ensure we were offering the support our students needed. We wanted to make sure the materials we were using were sequential, skills based and rigorous. After much research, we chose to use an intervention program called Kaleidoscope, which was created by the same publishers that wrote the Open Court reading program being used in LCUSD kindergarten through second grade levels.

Kaleidoscope emphasizes the use of phonics in decoding new words, teaches the elements of reading comprehension and gives practice on the conventions of language. The program provides materials for several different levels of reading ability. Students are assessed as to their abilities in all the components and are placed in a level which provides instruction in specific areas where they need support. Since students are working in small groups, they have more opportunity for help from the teacher. Students gain confidence in reading and in answering questions about what they are reading.

Students in kindergarten through sixth grades are provided with reading intervention in classes taught outside regular class time and are provided with support within the regular class time too. Reading teachers are coordinating instruction with regular classroom teachers. Small groups of 5 – 10 students allow for increased adult attention for each student. They also make it possible for all the students to participate in group discussions. Often, students who struggle in reading are not inclined to be active participants in the regular classes. Students attending our reading intervention will be assessed by the reading intervention teachers several times this year. Instruction will be planned that addresses the individual reading problems each student shows. As a part of our district's "Every Student Succeeds" philosophy, we believe that the students who participate in the reading intervention programs at our elementary schools will grow in their ability to succeed in school.



Academic Decathlon Scrimmage

On Saturday, November 18th, La Cañada High School will host five schools for the Los Angeles County Academic Decathlon fall scrimmage. Close to fifty high school teams practice competing at various host sites throughout the county. The football term scrimmage means “Throw out the ball and play.” For Academic Decathlon teams, it is an unofficial competition that allows practice in seven of the actual subject area tests. Eighteen LCHS students will participate in the practice competition, and will host teams from Gladstone High School in Azusa, Knight High School in Palmdale, Lynwood High School, and Baldwin Park High School.

Tom Traeger, the LCHS coach, looks forward to hosting the event. “It’s exciting that AD is back at LCHS, and that when we were asked to host the scrimmage, we decided to go for it. It’s a great way to practice and increase awareness of the team’s efforts.”

This scrimmage provides an excellent opportunity for prospective team finalists to gain experience and confidence. Many coaches will have their students participate in the scrimmage before finalizing their team roster. This is not a series of take-home tests; in fact, tests may not be taken from the test sites. The U.S. Academic Decathlon office is adamant that these are scrimmage materials, not study materials; and tests are to be collected, accounted for, and shredded after use on scrimmage day.

SCHEDULE:

8:00 a.m.	-	9:00 a.m.	—	Registration & Room Assignments
9:00 a.m.	-	10:30 a.m.	—	3 Exams
10:30 a.m.	-	11:00 a.m.	—	Break
11:00 a.m.	-	12:00 Noon	—	2 Exams
12:00 Noon	-	12:45 p.m.	—	Lunch Break
12:45 p.m.	-	1:45 p.m.	—	2 Exams

Scrimmage tests are authored by the USAD tests writers and are not “watered down”; rather, the tests are an alternative battery of exams that meet competition standards in every respect. There are seven 30-minute tests: art, economics, language & literature, mathematics, music, science, and the Super Quiz topic. Math has 35 items; all others have 50. Decathletes record multiple choice answers on Scantron sheets. The speech, interview, and essay portions are not included in the scrimmage. Coaches will serve as room monitors during exam periods and will help with Scantron scoring. Scored Scantron sheets will be returned to each team. Use of the scores is at the discretion of the coaches. Los Angeles County will post the school results on their website following the scrimmage.



Professions In the Arts

Professions in the Arts, a recent addition to LCHS Institutes for the 21st Century, is hosting a series of morning presentations by working professionals to La Cañada students interested in pursuing careers in occupations that have an artistic or creative focus such as costume design, screen-writing, editing, lighting, photography, and acting, as well as the production and direction of film and television projects.

Students hear from industry leaders and technical artists as they share insights on the responsibilities, the challenges, and the rewards of their work. Speakers also discuss the college requirements and preparation for the various careers. The line-up of presenters includes many accomplished members of the La Canada community who have volunteered their time to speak to these students who show up at 7:00 a.m. each Wednesday in the Media Arts center. Speakers provide students with a short professional biography and resume or list of credits and students have the opportunity to ask questions and seek advice. Students have heard from speakers who worked on such projects as *Boston Legal*, *Spongebob Squarepants*, and *Talladega Nights*, to name but a few. We are still interested in adding to our list of presenters and would love to hear from people who have the expertise and could volunteer their time to a valuable and popular course.

If you are interested, or know someone who might be, please contact LCHS Assistant Principal, Kevin Buchanan at (818) 952-4266 or Robin Cresto in Educational Services at the District Office at (818)953-8387



Technology Infrastructure Upgrades

Students and teachers around the district will soon be reaping the rewards of several technology infrastructure upgrade projects that are under way or are being planned. New network file servers at the high school have already dramatically improved the speed and reliability of the on-line attendance reporting system making a cumbersome task that used to take 10 minutes or more a breeze in less than a minute.

Each school is planning to upgrade parts of its internal network switching gear which in most cases, was installed ten years ago and designed for relatively slow and low bandwidth applications such as email and text file storage and retrieval. With the pervasive use of the network for web browsing, accessing multimedia content, and network based programs, the current site based networking hardware has been unable to keep up with the demands placed on it. First priority for each school will be replacing the core switch and the network switches feeding the computer labs. As funds allow, some schools may also choose to upgrade the remaining network switches that feed the individual classrooms extending the boost in network access speed and reliability to every teaching location.

In order to help foster even better communication between teachers and the community, the district is in the process of investigating a replacement for Ektron, its current teacher web page creation and management tool. While the district has had Ektron for three years, its use has been very limited due to its complexity, sluggishness, and unreliability. One promising candidate is the Classlink system created and used by Arcadia Unified School district. Classlink trades the complexity and sophistication of fancy graphics, bells and whistles for a simple, streamlined approach to quickly generating and maintaining web pages. Teachers around the district are being invited to test drive the Classlink system and provide feedback as to its potential as an effective Ektron replacement. Those interested in what Classlink can do can view Arcadia USD teacher generated webpages at <http://teachers.ausd.net/classlink>.



December 2006

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3 (1) PCY Bk. Fair 8:00-6:30 pm. CAFE	4 (2) PCY Bk. Fair 8:00-4:00 pm. CAFE ALF Instr. Rehearsal: 6-9:00 pm LANTERMAN	5 (5) Elem. Staff Mtg. 3:15 pm LCHS Instr. Council Mtg. 3:00 pm LCHS 7/8 PTA Mtg. 9:15 am IRC ALF Instr. Concert: 6-9:00 pm LANTERMAN Governing Bd Mtg. 7 pm DO Brd. Rm.	6 (3) LCHS 7/8 PTA Staff Holiday Lunch 11:45 am ALF Instr. Concert: 6-9:00 pm LANTERMAN Fine Arts Specialist Mtg. DO 3:30 pm	7 (2) PCR Rd. Table Pizza Night BTSA Support Provider Meeting: Closed Session Rm. 3:30 pm	1 (3) LCHS Drama Play 7:30 pm AUD. 2:00 pm & 7:30 pm on Sat. PCY Bk Fair. CAFE PCR Spirit Rally	2 (4) PCY Bk Fair CAFE LCHS-SAT Tests LCHS Drama Play 7:30 pm AUD. 2:00 pm & 7:30 pm on Sat. LCHS Band Championships or Montrose Parade
10	11 (2) LCHS Holiday Concert Rehearsal 3-6:00 pm AUD. LCE Food Drive	12 (2) LCE Food Drive PCY PTA Holiday Luncheon	13 (6) LCE PTA Mtg. & Holiday Lunch LCHS 7/8 Choral Band Concert 7:00 pm AUD. LCE Food Drive LCHS Holiday Concert Rehearsal 3-6:00 pm AUD. LCHS Orch. Tour- Elem. Sch. PCR Holiday Luncheon 11:00 am	14 (4) LCFEF General Mtg. 7:15 pm LCE LCHS Sch. Site Council Mtg. 3:00 pm LCE Food Drive LCHS 9-12 Holiday Staff Lunch	15 (3) LCE Spirit Rally/Lunch w/Child LCHS Comedy Sportz 7:30 pm AUD. LCE Food Drive	16
17	18	19 (4) LCHS Instr. Music 9-12 Holiday Concert AUD LCHS Instr. Council Mtg. 3:00 pm Elem. Staff Mtg. 3:15 pm PCY Drama Rehearsal: 8-3 p.m. LANTERMAN	20 (3) PCY Drama Prod. 6:00-9:00 pm LANTERMAN 20-Day Progress Reports Due Childcare Rd. Table 8:30 am DO	21 (1) LCE Rd. Table Pizza Night	22 (1) LCHS 7/8 IMAX Science Trip (Gr. 8)	23
24	25 (2) WINTER BREAK CEC Closed	26 (2) CEC Closed WINTER BREAK	27 (2) WINTER BREAK CEC Open Full Day Care	28 (2) WINTER BREAK CEC Open Full Day Care	29 (2) CEC Open Full Day Care WINTER BREAK	30 (1) WINTER BREAK

Superintendent

(continued from page 1)

been in-serviced in the Kaleidoscope intervention program from SRA/McGraw Hill Publishers. Aligned with the Open Court reading series, Kaleidoscope provides structured, sequential practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, word study, vocabulary development, comprehension strategies and writing. With this more proactive identification and with this more focused practice, the reading support we provide our elementary students has been strengthened significantly.

An example of what we mean by a support mechanism to assist all students is the Developmental Assets program. More a strategy than a curriculum, Developmental Assets is based on the idea that positive factors in families, communities, schools and in young people themselves can promote healthy development and high student achievement. As identified by the Search Institute of Minnesota, these assets involve constructive use of time, commitment to learning, social competencies, positive identity, boundaries and expectations, positive values, support and empowerment. Furthermore, as teachers and other adults work intentionally to form and maintain influential relationships that foster the assets, students respond by doing better in school. La Cañada Unified School District K-12 staff were trained by the Search Institute on November 1, 2006, and an evening session on that date provided advice and training for parents as well.

In cases like those above, where the programs already exist and the staff development has occurred, our goal is to make sure there is overall coordination--that a team is carefully tracking individual student progress and deciding how and when to implement specific supports. In other cases, we will be exploring new options (e.g., math



La Cañada Unified School District

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interventions, student advisories, tutorials built into the school day, buddy systems for new students, etc.) that can help every student succeed.

As each school coordinates its support programs, identifies monitoring teams, implements new options and tracks results, the plans will be crystallized. The plans may be different at each school, but the overall commitment to individual student success will be the same. The LCUSD mission statement captures the intent best when it states that our goal always is to be "a learning community dedicated to personal growth and academic achievement."



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