



La Cañada Unified

April - May 2009

Volume 4 - Issue 4

Message from the Superintendent

by James Stratton, Superintendent



A brief accounting of the state of the La Cañada Unified School District reveals many accomplishments. Academic achievement is among the highest in California, student excellence in the arts and athletics is widely recognized, educational program quality is continually monitored and district fiscal resources (despite ongoing budget cuts and unfunded mandates from the state) are effectively and proactively managed.

As measured by the state Academic Performance Index (API), LCUSD continues to rank among the top four highest achieving unified school districts in the state. Approximately 99% of our graduating seniors attend two and four year colleges and universities, with last year's graduates receiving acceptance letters from all but four of the top 25 national universities as ranked by US News and World Report. Our 2008 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) results were 581 for reading, 590 for writing and 612 for math. And, setting a new school record, 20 of our current seniors were named this year as National Merit Semifinalists.

Our students have also been chosen for all-state musical groups, awarded top honors at choral competitions, selected as winners in essay contests and recognized for artistic and vocational achievements. This year our girls' volleyball team won the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) championship, and many of our 21 boys' and girls' varsity sports teams secured Rio Hondo league championships.

Contributing to the high level of student success is our continual review and analysis of the educational program. Each school has strengthened its support services for students who are at risk of not mastering academic content standards. New University of California approved courses have been added at LCHS, more students have enrolled in career technical education courses and new Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) offerings have been added to the middle school

Through expanded use of online newsletters and rapid phone outreach services, we have maintained extensive and ongoing communication with community members on safety, financial, program and extracurricular topics. To gauge student, staff and parent feedback on various programs, our schools and our district office departments have initiated and analyzed a variety of satisfaction surveys. As always, stakeholders also have been actively involved in district interview panels, steering committees and advisory groups.

In regard to those financial variables over which we have direct control, the district has enhanced revenue and reduced operational expenses in ways that have prepared us better than many districts to confront the drastic budget cuts from Sacramento. We have increased our facility lease rates as well as the total space available for leasing. Increases in developer fees have allowed us to augment our construction bond dollars and to expand the number of renovation projects. The bond construction itself has been extremely

(continued on last page)



LC Newsline

The Newsboard

By Joel Peterson, President



In this column I address the financial and operational management of the La Cañada Unified School District (LCUSD) and whether there is further “fat” that can easily be cut. I will offer facts that support the view that LCUSD is well managed, compares exceptionally well against the state’s top districts, and that there is little excess to be found.

Containment of Personnel Costs

Personnel costs represent about 85% of our operating expenses. Our teachers compare exceptionally well in qualifications, experience, and student achievement with the state’s top schools. Our teacher compensation is not excessive – they are not at the very top; rather, they are in the middle of peer districts according to data in the Los Angeles County compensation schedules.

By objective measures of qualifications, experience, and district performance, our administrators and principals also compare with the best in the state. However, they are compensated in the bottom quarter among all 46 districts in LA County. Additionally, we did not replace our Deputy Superintendent for Finance when he left two years ago, but use a consultant at a much lower cost.

While keeping class sizes small (20:1) in crucial early years (K-3) and in key subjects, like 9th grade Math and English, we have actively managed and lowered our personnel costs through attrition and targeted elimination of positions to match our decline in student enrollment over the last several years.

Findings from district workshops in 2006 and 2007 documented that we have more students per classroom on average than our peer districts, especially at the high school level, and we have one of the lowest administrative expense ratios in the state. Even so, the district’s standardized scores remain among the top four of all K-12 school districts in California. Our relatively higher average class size and low administrative ratio speaks to the district’s successful efforts to control costs while maintaining an exceptional learning program.

Prudent Growth of Reserves

Four years ago, the district’s general reserve was near the lowest legal limit (3% of operating expenses). By consistent focus and insistence on conservative fiscal policies, cost containment and continual budget monitoring, our reserves are now at 15 percent – about \$5 million. Without this reserve, prudently built over the last several years, we would not be as prepared to face the recent actual and newly projected state funding cuts (expected to be about \$15 million cumulatively over the next four years).

Attention to Operations

The district continues to implement meaningful cuts, including a recent set which will reduce expenses by approximately \$800,000 per year. These are cuts that the district can survive for the next few years, but can’t be sustained in perpetuity.



Helpful Links from
the LCUSD website:

Governing Board
Meeting Schedule

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

LCUSD Master
Calendar:

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

LCUSD GATE
Advisory Council

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

LCUSD Bond
Oversite Committee

[http://www.lcusdnet/
facilities](http://www.lcusdnet/facilities)

District Deploys New Student Information System

Over the spring break, the technology department upgraded the district's data processing infrastructure with new, state of the art file servers and deployed a new centralized student information system (Aeries CS) which replaced an older system based on distributed databases.

The new system will allow more accurate data entry and immediate access districtwide to all data changes while providing a more responsive and dependable working environment. Teachers have already begun to experience a much faster and more reliable attendance and grade entry process due to the new system. The new system will also allow the district to integrate with the state's new student information system (also known as CALPADs) which will save the district an enormous amount of time and personnel resources in complying with state data submission requirements.

Through careful planning, the entire project, which cost over \$50,000, was paid for through various grants obtained by the technology department resulting in no impact on the district's General Fund. Usually in a project of such size and scope, problems and glitches are to be expected, but the technology department is pleased to report that the installation was completed ahead of schedule, within budget, and with no interruptions in service.

- Enoch Kwok, Director of Technology

We have not focused solely on expense cuts; we have also expanded non-traditional sources of revenue. Over the last several years, the district has renegotiated all its major leases, bringing rates up to market, while more aggressively marketing our properties. We now have more tenants paying more rent, and creating the highest lease income in the district's history.

Importantly, the district's state taxpayer-provided operating funds pay almost nothing for sports, arts, and enrichment programs. Nearly all of our head coaches are full-time teachers and all coaches receive a very small stipend for coaching. Uniforms, balls, bats, pads, batting cages, nets, etc. are covered almost completely by parent groups and organizations such as Spartan Boosters, while enrichment and arts are covered by the Educational Foundation, parent groups, and PTA, among others. All field trips, concert tours, and special sporting tournaments are fully funded by parent donations. Finally, nearly all our outdoor fields are maintained by the City at no cost to the district through a Joint Use Agreement.

Improved Construction Management

District construction projects are funded by voter-approved bond measures. This money must only be used for the capital projects listed in the bond documents and cannot be used for operating expenses. Several years ago, the district revitalized its construction management process, replaced its outside construction management firm at lower cost, instituted community input for value engineering, and streamlined and made transparent reporting, oversight, and decision making processes. Since then, our construction projects have been on schedule and on, or under, budget, with many fully completed.

Fair Sharing of the Financial Burden

The proposed parcel tax would be less than the cost of a postage stamp per day per parcel, and sunsets after five years. It would take a new election and a two-thirds majority to put in place a replacement tax. If passed, this parcel tax would replace about 25 percent of the projected state cuts and takeaways to the district. The balance of the short fall would be made up by using reserves, newly authorized cuts, and no budgeted salary increases for anyone for the next three years. This financial crisis will be survived mostly through the continuing rigorous management of expenses and revenues, as well as new cost cuts. We are simply asking the entire community to play a relatively small, but meaningful, part to preserve and protect our schools in an undisputed time of financial and economic crisis.



STAR Testing

Students in grades 2-11 are required to participate in state-mandated Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessments in May. These assessments, which are the cornerstone of state and federal accountability, will take place a little later in the school year than in the past. The testing window will be from May 11 – 22. The STAR testing program consists of the California Standards Test (CST), the California Modified Assessment (CMA), the California Alternative Performance Assessment (CAPA) and the Standards-based Test in Spanish (STS). The California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition (CAT/6), has been eliminated this year. Although not officially part of the STAR Program, the Early Assessment Program (EAP) multiple choice items will also be given at the same time.

The different kinds of required STAR assessments and the number of different subject areas to be tested are almost overwhelming. All students in grades 2-11 take CST English/language arts and all students in grades 2-9 take a CST math standards test. A CST science test will be administered to students in grades 5, 8 and 10. The CST history-social science assessment is given to students in grades 8, 10 and 11. High school students will also take an end-of-course CST in math, science and social science test in grades 9-11 in addition to the other required assessments, if enrolled in those classes. The STS is administered to Spanish-speaking English learners in grades 2-7 enrolled the U.S. for one year or less. Eleventh graders may also complete the EAP multiple-choice questions in English and mathematics.

Students with disabilities, who are unable to take the CSTs, even with accommodations, will be given either the CMA or the CAPA. The CMA has been expanded from only grades 3-5 to grades 3-8 this year. Students in grades 2-11 may take the CAPA. These assessments were designed for students with special needs and which test each student will take is decided by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team meeting and recorded in the document.

Parents and schools will receive individual reports of the students' STAR test results at the end of the summer. The test results will be sent home and will show the student's performance on each test and in each subject area.

As always, it is important that all our students do their best on these tests. History tells us that "test fatigue" is prevalent in the 11th grade and especially those students should be reminded of the importance of doing well. The high school is focusing on a campaign to encourage students to take these tests seriously and be #1! The STAR tests results are the most significant factor in creating the base Academic Performance Index (API) score upon which the district's growth is figured. Currently, LCUSD is only one API point away from being the third top unified school district in the state. The STAR scores are also used as part of determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the federal accountability system. In addition, college admissions officers consider the results as a strong indicator of school quality. It is important to note that at least 95% of all students must take these tests in order to meet the state and federal accountability guidelines.

- Lindi Dreibelbis Arthur, Director of Assessment



Website Shortcuts

<http://www.lcusd.net>

[/lchs - High School](#)

[/lchs78 - Jr. High](#)

[/lce - La Canada Elem](#)

[/pcr - Palm Crest Elem](#)

[/pcy - Paradise Canyon](#)

[/cal - District Calendar](#)

[/classlink - teachers
classlink websites](#)

[/govboard - board of Ed](#)

[/news - Newsletter](#)

[/sarc - School Account-
ability Report Cards](#)

[/SpecialEd -
Special Education](#)

[/teachers - HS teachers](#)



LCHS 7/8 Embraces Diversity

Cultures from around the world were represented at the annual La Cañada High School 7/8 Multicultural Luncheon held on March 19th at Oak Grove Field. Students sampled foods from several different countries including Germany, China, Japan, Mexico, Israel, Korea, and Italy as they were entertained by the band “The Chase.” The luncheon was devoted to multicultural entertainment with the goal to expose students to people and cultures they may not be familiar with. This annual event supports the LCHS 7/8 commitment to enhancing multicultural awareness. The luncheon was sponsored by the 7/8 PTA. Special thanks go to the many parent volunteers who prepared food and helped with the organization of the event.

- Jackie Luzak, LCHS 7/8 Principal



Eighth Grade Career Day

Eighth Grade Career Day will take place on Friday, May, 29th from 11:50 a.m. to 2:35 p.m. at La Cañada High School. Career Day is an annual service project sponsored and organized by local Senior Girl Scout Troops. Speakers, representing over 25 career areas, are solicited by the scouts. The speakers spend an afternoon at La Cañada High School, where they host sessions in which they explain the requirements and demands of their careers. All 8th grade students will attend six sessions. Career Day is a wonderful opportunity for our students to gain exposure to a variety of careers and for them to learn from the expertise offered by the speakers.

- Jackie Luzak, LCHS 7/8 Principal



Elementary Open House

Open House will be held at our three LCUSD Elementary Schools on Thursday, May 28th from 6:30p.m. until 8:00p.m. Students, parents, community members, parents of incoming kindergartners, and families moving into the area are invited to attend. On this special evening, teachers display samples of student work from throughout the school year to reflect what students have accomplished. Often, students have created portfolios or booklets that highlight instructional themes or units studied during the year. Bulletin boards, display boards, science experiments, or technology projects are also used to showcase individual student work and whole class activities. Students may act as guides or hosts to escort visitors through the classroom displays. In some classrooms, visitors may be asked to participate in an activity or respond to a questionnaire. At Open House, all students are valued and appreciated for standards they have mastered and for work they have completed with the guidance and instruction of our outstanding instructional staff.

- Elissa Deangelo, LCE Principal



Personnel Reductions for 2009-2010

With the massive funding reductions to local educational agencies from Sacramento, Districts across the state have been forced to reduce or eliminate personnel to cut costs in order to maintain financial solvency. These reductions in force, otherwise known as “layoffs,” are painful to employees and to Districts, as they signify loss for entire communities as well as to the individuals who are noticed. Because of the high profile nature of these notices in the local and state press, a clear explanation regarding the types of employment notices and the status of LCUSD with regards to lay offs is detailed here in order to provide a beneficial level of transparency to newsletter readers.

This time of year, three different types of notices regarding future employment may be issued per the Educational Code to certificated employees. “Lay Off” notices may be issued to staff for a lack of work or lack of funds; this is also true for classified staff (i.e. office, paraprofessional, custodial staffs, etc.). Probationary teachers, those who have served less than two years and who have not achieved “permanent status,” may be issued non-reelection notices without the District citing cause for non-reelection. However, employees may not be non-reelected in lieu of a layoff. And, finally, teachers serving on a one-year temporary contract may receive release notices if the District anticipates that the funding for the position may be in jeopardy or if the position may not be staffed next year due to declining enrollment.

All of these types of notices are fraught with the anxiety over loss of employment, however, only “lay offs” are associated with “pink slips,” which have been highlighted in recent news. With Districts facing difficult decisions to prepare balanced budgets, neighboring Districts have reported the following numbers of lay offs: South Pasadena – 46, San Marino – 47, Alhambra – 21, Arcadia – 57, Charter Oak – 40, and Temple City – 34. Due to the sound fiscal management of the La Canada Unified School District’s Governing Board and Superintendent, LCUSD issued a total of seven (7) lay off notices to full and part time employees, with a full time equivalency of 3.2 employees. Six of these notices were precautionary notices linked to funding the Regional Occupation Program (ROP) at the high school, and as the budget projections stabilize, LCUSD is anticipating being able to rescind these notices and have all of these teachers return to their positions in 2009-10.

With regards to lay offs for the District’s classified staff, the Governing Board voted to eliminate six (6) positions (a total of 27.5 hours per day) due to a lack of work. Some of these positions may be reinstated based upon the program needs of students within the District. Additionally, two (2) positions (a total of 15 hours per day) were eliminated due to a lack of funds. The reduction of these two positions was necessitated by funding cuts from the State.

The Governing Board, Superintendent, and Fiscal and Human Resources Departments of LCUSD value each and every one of the certificated and classified employees within the District. They share an on-going commitment to managing resources strategically and efficiently in order to minimize the impact of state funding reductions on District personnel, while continuing to provide outstanding educational services to students.

- Wendy Sinnette, Assistant Superintendent



PCR Multi-purpose room construction is nearly finished

Construction Update

Earlier this month the tennis courts at La Canada High School were reopened for use by the school and community. The addition of a sixth court, paid for by the City through Joint Use, will facilitate the high school tennis teams during practice and matches and will allow for more community use. The project included new lights, resurfacing and new wind screens.

The construction on the new multipurpose rooms at PCR and PCY continues to progress on time and within budget. The PCR building is eighty percent complete and is expected to be completed in June. The PCY building, which was started after PCR, is forty-five percent completed and is expected to be completed in late August. You can visit the project photo website at www.flickr.com/photos/lmatlcsud/ for regular updates.

At our last Governing Board meeting, the Governing Board accepted the bid for the modernization of the “A” building. This modernization includes work on all three floors, including a new science lab on the second floor and the enlarging of a majority of the labs on the third floor, as well as the modernization of the remaining classrooms in the building. The accepted bid was significantly lower than our estimates due to the timing of the bids and the high number of contractors that bid on the project. This will allow us to complete additional projects with remaining Bond funds. It should be noted that these monies can only be used for modernization projects identified by the Bond language that the voters approved.

- Mike Leininger, Assistant Superintendent



PCY multi-purpose room construction is progressing steadily

New tennis courts at the the high school campus.



Superintendent

(continued from page 1)

well managed, with the bid for our most recent project (modernization of the A Building at LCHS) coming in about a million dollars under the projection. Freeing more dollars for General Fund use, we have utilized state grants to purchase technology and to fund district office and site support positions.

Reduced worker comp claims and health insurance premium increases below the state average have saved us money. In addition, we have reduced custodial staff, cut supply budgets, funded administrative salaries in the bottom quartile of the county, maintained class sizes above those of comparably achieving districts and reduced Special Education costs by implementing in-house services instead of utilizing non-public agencies.

Despite these cost saving measures, the state budget cuts will hit us hard. By the year 2012-13 we will have suffered cuts and take-aways of over \$15 million. We are responding by further cutting teaching and non-teaching staff, reducing district office positions, suspending new textbook purchases for one year, suspending deferred maintenance funding and suspending funding for property lease maintenance and retirement benefit accounts. Our budgets also contain no staff salary increases over the next three years. However, even the combined implementation of these aggressive measures and the spending down of our sizeable reserves will not be enough to close the state shortfall. With no other assistance, we will face a budget deficit of over \$5.5 million by 2012-13.

That reality is the major reason the Governing Board has authorized a mail-in parcel tax election for June of this year that would bring in \$150 per parcel over the next five years. With successful passage, we would be able to reduce that 2012-13 deficit to just over \$2 million. Still a shortfall but not nearly as extreme.

It is also important to remember that all of our budgeting is based on a series of assumptions about politics and the economy. If state deficits increase above current projections, if the May 19 ballot initiatives fail, if the state implements increased employer contributions to em-



La Cañada Unified School District

Cabinet

Superintendent:
James Stratton

Asst. Superint.
Mike Leininger

Asst. Superint.
Wendy Sinnette

Governing Board

President
Joel Peterson

Vice President
Jeanne Broberg

Clerk
Scott Tracy

Member
Cindy Wilcox

Member
Susan Boyd



ployee retirement accounts, if we do not receive expected federal stimulus dollars or if we do not receive any Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) from the state in years 2010-13, we will be facing even bigger shortfalls.

Equally sobering is what will occur if the parcel tax does not pass. Among the likely cuts will be elimination of K-3 and 9th grade class size reduction, layoffs in the teaching staff raising class sizes to 36, reduction of counselors, elimination of certain elective classes, reductions in high school athletics, elimination of technology purchases and elimination of positions in high school administration, maintenance, security, technology and the district office.

Now more than ever, we value and appreciate the support of the community. On behalf of the staff and students, I would like to thank the hardworking directors of the La Cañada Flintridge Educational Foundation, the directors of the parcel tax steering committee and all of our parent volunteers and parcel tax supporters throughout the community.



LC Newline Editor:
Enoch Kwok



La Cañada Unified School District
4490 Cornishon Ave.
La Cañada, CA 91011
818.952.8300