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March 2006

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From the Superintendent...

School bus transportation for students has been of considerable interest by many within the District and the community. With the projected increase of enrollment in the next several years, there is concern that facility development and the reconfiguration of the elementary schools alone will not mitigate increased congestion and long waiting lines at the campuses for parents who transport their children.

Last fall the Board of Education commissioned a Feasibility Study for School Bus Transportation, which was conducted by Mike Rea, a consultant with the Fiscal Crisis and

Student Calendar for 2007-08 Adopted

At its Regular Meeting in February, the Board of Education adopted a Student Calendar for 2007-08.

Each year there are several challenges to developing a calendar. The District has historically attempted to align the calendar with the Sequoia Union High School District (Menlo-Atherton High School) for major internal holidays and vacation periods. It is also required that the school calendar be negotiated with employee unions. This year, the Superintendent took representative input from the District Council of the PTO to ascertain parent interest and explore calendar options.

The following are important dates:

Management Assistance Team (FCMAT). The final report was presented to the Board at its meeting in January.

Mike Rea reported that many public school districts abandoned their school bus programs in the 1970s given the financial constraints produced by Proposition 13. Thereafter in 1982, the California Department of Education froze funding for school transportation programs except for occasional cost of living adjustments. Currently, school districts that provide comprehensive programs receive about 45% of costs, with the remaining 55% supported from general operational funds.

Menlo Park's current program is far from comprehensive. The District received \$47,490 in 2005-06 from the State to transport Tinsley students and six special education students. This results in a \$116,737 encroachment on the General Fund. If the District increases its transportation service, it will not receive any additional funding from the State. The only alternative would be to sponsor legislation at the State to increase the apportionment, which would have little chance of passing according to our consultant.

Last spring the District surveyed parents to ascertain interest. Nearly 600 families responded. By extrapolating the data, the survey indicated that approximately 52% of students would use a school bus. This would represent about 1,100 students requiring 15-16 single-run bus routes or eight double-run routes.

The Feasibility Study, presented in January, compared the costs of school bus transportation among several contractors and the District purchasing buses and employing the necessary staff. Whereas the cost for a District program would be \$85,000 per year per bus route, the estimated costs from contractors ranged from \$67,500 to \$72,000. (The major difference is compliance with recent legislation that requires new buses [District] to provide seat belts for students; whereas contractors can service an increased number of students on their existing buses without seat belts.)

The Feasibility Study demonstrated that, by operating double runs, the full costs of school bus transportation for approximately 50% of the schools' enrollment would range between \$540,000 - \$600,000 per year in addition to our current \$116,000 cost. This would necessitate a change in the beginning and ending times of the schools and supervision of students who would arrive at school on the first bus run. Additionally, bus stops would be established. Generally, the walking distances to schools should not exceed one-half mile for elementary students and one mile for middle school pupils.

A parent fee for school bus transportation is permissible

Aug 22	Arena Check-In at Hillview
Aug 23	First day of student attendance for all schools
Sept 3	Labor Day
Oct 19	Staff Development Day (3 day weekend)
Nov 12	Veterans Day (3 day weekend)
Nov 21-23	Thanksgiving Break (Wednesday – Friday)
Dec 21	Minimum Day prior to Winter Recess (Friday)
Dec. 24 - Jan. 4	Winter Recess
Jan 21	Martin Luther King Holiday (3 day weekend)
Feb 18-22	President Day- February Break
Mar 17-21	Spring Break
Apr 18 & 21	Staff Development Day and local holiday (4 day weekend)
May 26	Memorial Day
Jun 12	Last day of Student Attendance

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under State law with a maximum round trip fee of \$7.64, equal to \$1,375 for 180 days of school attendance. According to the parent survey last spring, ridership would drop by 24.9% if any fees were assessed and to 6.4% if fees were in excess of \$1,000 per year.

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Consultant Mike Rea shared that most public school districts are interested in eliminating or reducing school bus transportation services because of the enormous encroachment on educational funds.

So where are we now? In no particular order of priority, the following are my thoughts:

- We are working with the City of Menlo Park and the Town of Atherton to address the issues of congestion and traffic and look for reasonable solutions.
- We need to evaluate the benefits of the reconfiguration of the elementary schools, when more parents will have their children in one school.
- We need to work with public transit providers to better serve the needs of transporting students to school, particularly to Hillview Middle School.
- We need to promote and provide incentives for safe routes to schools to encourage bicycling and walking, creating an infrastructure within the Community to reduce or re-route automobile traffic.
- We need to continue to explore school bus transportation by conducting another parent survey that better evaluates parent interest given the financial implications and projected changes in school operations.
- We need to consider the use of buses for shuttle services from specific locations within the Community or from school to school.
- We need to ensure that new school construction improves drop-off and pick-up operations and parking for parents.

Given the problems, the interest in school bus transportation is clearly valid, but the implementation is complex both financially and operationally. But like all issues in our community, I believe together we have a tremendous capacity and resourcefulness to find appropriate solutions to mitigate the problems. It will necessitate a broader analysis because the traffic and congestion of the four Menlo Park City schools is only part of the overall impact on the community. Given several private schools and other thoroughfares for commuters within the District borders, this issue requires true collaboration among all the schools, the municipalities and County.

The District is committed to the work. Stay tuned.

Ken Ranella

Superintendent

From the Board President...

Building a 21st Century Middle School Program

Much of the focus at recent board meetings about planning Hillview's construction has been about how various design alternatives for Hillview might accommodate the necessary square footage, field space, traffic, parking, etc. At the January 30th meeting, it became clear that rebuilding Hillview will best meet both educational and community needs. But the most challenging and interesting part of the design process will be developing the educational specifications for new Hillview facilities.



Hillview today is a very successful school that provides tremendous value to our entire community. It is the most recognized school in the state, having been named a California Distinguished School seven times between 1986 and 2005, as well as having been named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2000. In multiple meetings last year, the board heard from parents and faculty that maintaining Hillview as the single middle school is a top educational priority for our community. Parents and faculty value the depth and breadth of program that Hillview offers, such as engaging interdisciplinary programs like "Greek Week" and "Dancing through the Decades", and advanced curricular offerings, such as Geometry 1. Students value the strong sense of community.

Hillview's core mission to "offer a challenging academic program in a safe, caring environment" will remain constant. But as we think about building a new Hillview facility that will still be in use 30-50 years in the future, we must consider the ways in which Hillview's programs might evolve to serve the mission. What educational programs should be included in a 21st Century Hillview School: core, electives, and enrichments? How might the school organize to deliver the identified educational programs with over 900 students? What facilities should be designed and developed to deliver the identified educational programs both operationally and educationally?

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a new 21st Century middle school facility for our community. Defining the vision for a 21st Century middle school program is essential to getting the most value from new Hillview facilities.

Board to Select Design Option for Hillview School



At a Special Meeting on March 6, Superintendent Ranella and the District Facility Planning Team will present their recommendation to the Board of Education for the development of Hillview

Middle School. This meeting follows two Special Meetings conducted by the Board of Education that included extended public hearings for parents, neighbors, and Community members.

The first session on December 6 reviewed the challenges for the facility development of the campus, identified special problems, and concluded with the determination of design criteria to evaluate options.

At the January 30 Special Meeting, Architect Erwin Lee of *Deems, Lewis and McKinley Architects* of San Francisco presented site plans of five schematic options to meet the projected enrollment growth. They included examples of expanding the current campus with two-story buildings and both partial and complete replacement of the campus. The January 30 meeting concluded with Board direction to the District Facility Team and the Architect to explore both the replacement of the campus on the existing footprint of the campus and the replacement of the campus on the current athletic field. The Board of Education determined that both options substantially addressed the design criteria.

On March 6, beginning at 7:00 p.m. in the Hillview Multi, Superintendent Ranella and the Facility Planning Team will present their recommendations. Both a site plan and an architectural rendering of the campus will be presented for public review.

In both of the previous Special Meetings, the public provided substantial input to the Board. Approximately 200 people attended the January 30 meeting. Comments can be categorized according to two areas. Concerns were expressed by neighbors regarding the projected enrollment of the school that will create congestion, additional parking needs, and buildings in proximity to the perimeter of the campus. The other major category of input responded to the extraordinary opportunity to develop a 21st Century facility that will enhance the educational program of the District's middle school.

Central to the discussion among the public at the meeting was the projected size of enrollment at Hillview. Several individuals expressed concern about the projected 900 students and have requested that the Board consider

splitting the school into two component parts operating sixth, seventh and eighth grades at Encinal School. Others during the public hearings described the value of Hillview Middle School, the current operation and its exemplary programs. In previous meetings with the Hillview faculty, the unanimous recommendation was to maintain Hillview as the sole middle school in the District and empower the school staff to develop its programs to accommodate the growing enrollment.

The meeting of the Board of Education on March 6 is one of the most important meetings of the year.

[For more on facility development....](#)

District Issues First Facility Bonds

At the February 15 meeting of the Board of Education, Superintendent Ranella reported that competitive bidding for \$35 million of bonds had concluded. The District received 10 conforming bids for the sale of the bonds. The winning bid from Morgan Stanley turned out to have a True Interest Cost of 4.397719%. Prior to the competitive bidding, financial advisors to the District had estimated a 4.45% interest cost. This savings will enable greater flexibility in the financial plan for the full \$91.1 million bonds that was approved by the Community in spring of 2006.



The competitive bidding process followed presentations to Moody and Standard and Poor's in January by Board Member Jeff Child, Chief Business Official Diane White and Superintendent Ken Ranella about the financial health of the District and the Community. The credit rating was improved to AA+.

The next meeting of the [Bond Oversight Committee](#), comprised of Community representatives appointed by the Board, will review the first issuance of the bonds and the expenditure plan and timeline. The Bond Oversight Committee provides ongoing oversight of bond expenditures and develops annual financial and performance audits for public review.

Media Sensationalizes Homework Program

During the last week a variety of local and national media outlets have reported on the homework policy of the District and practices at Oak Knoll School. In an effort to sensationalize this high profile issue, these media reports have unfortunately misrepresented the District and the school. Neither the District nor Oak Knoll School has banned

homework as has been erroneously reported in some news accounts.

The district has a well-considered and thoughtful homework policy that was redeveloped in January 2004 after several meetings of input from parents and staff. The Policy defines the maximum amount of time for homework for each grade level, encourages reading at the primary level, and directs that homework is meaningful and relevant to the classroom instructional program and appropriate to students' ability and needs. The policy also acknowledges that *excessive homework could have negative consequences on some children producing undue stress and fatigue and denying access to leisure time*. The full policy can be accessed [online](#).

I support the work of our principals and faculties of our schools for developing practices that are consistent with the provisions of the board policy. Clearly Oak Knoll has implemented such practices this year. At all schools homework programs are monitored, and parents are surveyed annually to determine the application of the Policy.

Certainly the media reports that Oak Knoll School or other Menlo Park City schools have *banned homework* are distortions simplifying a well considered and thoughtful Policy and program.

Ken Ranella, Superintendent

[Click here for homework policy](#)

District and Foundation to Submit Joint Use Application

During February the Board of the Menlo-Atherton Education Foundation and the District Governing Board authorized representatives to develop a Joint Use Agreement for the submission of an application to the State Office of Public School Construction. Foundation Co-Presidents Ted Schlein and Maria Hilton, Governing Board Member Jeff Child and Superintendent Ken Ranella have met to develop the Agreement to be submitted with the State application.



The Joint Use Application will enable the District to obtain \$1 million in State funding for the construction of a Teacher Education Resource Center adjacent to the District Office on Encinal Avenue. The facility will house programs that the Foundation supports through its annual grant, the Technology Department, training rooms for faculty through the Teacher Excellence Initiative, a distribution center for elementary science materials and an expanded Foundation office for

operations. (The Foundation currently operates from a small office at Encinal School authorized through the District Facility Use Policy.) Many of the other operations are currently housed in portable classrooms at school sites.

In usual circumstances, both the District and the Foundation must contribute a matching \$1 million dollars to the State grant for construction costs. Research of the Education Code and OPSC regulations yielded an identification of an exception. If a local bond (Measure U in spring of 2006) identifies the construction among its list of projects and intends community use of the facility, the joint-use partner (Foundation) is exempt from its contribution to the project.

MPAEF's Jeanie Ritchie Grants In Full Swing

For 22 years, MPAEF grants for innovative teaching have been encouraging district kids to learn in new and creative ways. This year is no exception -- twenty-five Jeanie Ritchie grants have been awarded to eighty district teachers. As parents, how



do you know that a Jeanie Ritchie grant is in progress? Your normally tight-lipped teen comes home telling you about the POETRY that he or she wrote. Or your second grader goes on a really cool field trip to the S.F. Exploratorium and can't wait to tell you how physics is happening everywhere around you. Jeanie Ritchie grants are currently in progress in every school in the district, including the three highlighted here:

"Bridging the World with Rhythm" *Hillview, Oak Knoll, Encinal, Laurel*
K-8th grades, 2200+ students

District music teachers Richard Vaughan, John Ashfield and Bee Tee initiated this grant to teach students about the various cultural contexts of music. Students broaden their appreciation of how music and dance from other countries has influenced the Americas. This particular grant is unique because it spans the entire district, reaching students at every grade level. In January, Encinal and Laurel students experienced a "multi-cultural musical world tour" as they participated in energetic assemblies and team-building workshops led by [Crosspulse](#), a Bay Area percussion ensemble. These rhythmic, interactive musical learning experiences will continue at Oak Knoll on February 6th and Hillview on March 13th.

Encinal students (pictured below) had fun trying out new body percussion skills.



Playing With Poetry/Theatreworks

Oak Knoll 2nd grade, 120 students

Teachers Bill Quarre, Christine Aronson, Patty Kelley, Sara Kew, Wendy Gapastione, and Lynn Murphy wanted to open up the world of poetry for young students in an interactive way. Facilitated by Theatreworks, their unique grant engages children in poetry, language, movement and theater, and culminates in an Open Workshop performance for families and students.

Living History

Hillview 7th grade, 233 students

If Leonardo Da Vinci were alive today, what would he say to Hillview seventh graders? Students will find out thanks to this grant organized by teachers Sharron Thompson, Bruce Hicks, Cheryl Perez, Mike Rogers, Martha Rosenthal, and Kim Staff. History comes alive as students hear first-hand from guest speakers and performers representing various cultural and historical periods. In December, a guest speaker from the Islamic Speaker's Bureau discussed with students the contributions that Muslims have made to the world. Hillview math teacher Michael Doroquez also shared pictures and experiences from his time spent in Western Africa while serving in the Peace Corps. In the months ahead, presenters on Buddhism, the Renaissance, Meso-America, and modern day exploration will actively engage Hillview students in 7th grade history.

[For all the grants...](#)

Measure U Bond Update

In the last several months there has been a great deal of news and activity regarding Hillview Middle School as the District engages the public in the decision making process. The District has concurrently been active in the planning process at the elementary schools.



At all three elementary schools, the Site Design Committee's have held regular meetings with the Architect to develop the site plans. The Site Design Committees are

comprised of teachers, staff, parents, and neighbors that were developed by the School Principals. The main function of the Committees is to provide the Architect with input and recommendations as to site and design issues. The work of the Site Design Committee must meet the requirements of the District Design Guidelines and site specific requirements as developed by the District Facility Committee. **The development of the conceptual site plans will be completed in the next few weeks and the proposed plans will be presented to the Board and Community at two public meeting on March 13 and March 19 for Encinal/Laurel Schools and Oak Knoll School, respectively.**

In other developments, the School Board at the February 15, 2007, meeting adopted a sustainability or "green" school resolution that calls for the Bond Projects to meet the requirements of a High Performance School as set forth by CHPS. For more information on the CHPS Guidelines, please refer to www.chps.net. This is an important step for the District and a commitment to the Community that the District will do its part for the environment and the future of our children. The District has also moved ahead with planning and design work for summer 2007. The summer projects include interim classrooms at Encinal, field improvements at Encinal, Pre-school/Occupational Therapy Facility at Laurel, and parking lot improvements at Laurel.

The District is hopeful that by end of March most of the critical decisions will have been made so the staff can complete the Master Plan and present a draft of the of the Plan to the Board that will include the master budget and schedule. If you have any questions or would like to find out more information about the Measure U Bond program please contact Ahmad Sheikholeslami, Facility Planner/Program Manager, at 650-321-7140.

Ahmad Sheikholeslami
Facility Planner/Program Manager

[CHPS guidelines....](#)

Board Highlights

The Menlo Park City School District Board of Education held Special meetings on December 6 and January 17th; and regular meetings on December 13 , January 16, and February 15. There was also a Special Board meeting on Facility Options at Hillview Middle School on January 30th.



The next Regular School Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 13th at 7pm, in the Board Room at the District Office, 181 Encinal Avenue, Atherton. *(The text of Official Minutes is posted to the District Website following*

Board approval.)" There will be a Special Board Meeting on March 6th on Hillview School Facility Development.

[For all minutes...](#)

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