

A Note From the OPUSD Board President

Dear Parents and Community Members,

This is the first of a new monthly communication written by the Oak Park Unified School District Board President in order to communicate highlights from our board meetings as well as other happenings of interest in the district. This being the first address, I would like to introduce the 5 OPUSD Board Members: Ms. Jan Iceland, Dr. Marie Panec, Ms. Mary Pallant, Mr. Allen Rosen, and myself, Barbara Laifman. Please feel free to view each member's profile on the OPUSD website – www.oakparkusd.org and select *Board of Education* under the *About Us* tab. The Board, in conjunction with Dr. Tony Knight, Superintendent, compose the Governance Team. We held a special meeting in March containing valuable discussions in regard to governance team protocols, modes of operation and goal setting, with a decision to conduct a yearly self-evaluation in order to further strengthen the governance team and enhance its ability to serve the community.

Here are some of the highlights from our April Board Meeting. We made presentations to Kevin Lu, a Medea Creek Middle School student for his winning performances in regional spelling, geography and math competitions. We also recognized the outstanding achievements of the Oak Park High School National Merit Scholars. We approved overnight field trips for qualifying CIF playoff teams, an OPHS Girl's Summer Basketball tournament and for two of our high school clubs, the rocket team (for a potential national contest) and the Solar Boat Team, to further their authentic learning experiences. We made decisions which will enable the district to continue moving forward with certain Measure R projects such as Rehabilitation of the Science labs at the high school and studies to improve traffic flow and parking at Brookside Elementary and Medea Creek in anticipation of future construction in regard to these parking facilities, most importantly for student safety, and additionally to ease traffic in the areas. We approved the district's 5-year Local Education Agency Plan, which is a federal mandate in conjunction with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

A few other points of interest. This summer, substantially due to a donation from a local soccer organization Real SoCal, in conjunction with the Athletic Booster club at Oak Park High School, a high quality artificial turf field will be installed at the high school, replacing the current grass field. This should be a safer playing area for the athletes as well as to save water and other maintenance costs for the district over the long run. Also over summer there will be Measure R projects under way (other than what was mentioned above), materializing much needed improvements to the school sites such as new fire alarms at all of the sites, and exterior painting at Medea Creek and Brookside .

April also marked an annual district wide effort by the Environmental Education and Awareness Committee in regard to educating our community and students about environmental and sustainable practices through a day long Earthfest at the Oak Park High School, which kicked off and was followed by a weeklong of district wide and site activities in regard to the protection of our environment, with a specific focus on our oceans. There is so much to report on including our district's noteworthy high school graduation rate of 99.13%, two teachers, Susan Allen from Oak View High School and Jane Schulze from Oak Park Independent School, who won awards for their contribution to gifted education by the California Association for the Gifted. Two of the many success stories from Oak View High School (our alternative high school program), one a student who won a writing award from the California Continuation Education Association for describing in an essay why Oak View is important to him as well as an alumni of Oak View who went on to Moorpark, then to USC where he will be graduating this year with honors, and will then be attending Harvard University to attain his graduate degree in business.

I wish I could end this note in as positive a manner as all the good that I have just reported. It wouldn't be an honest address if I did not express my deep concern for the budget that we are looking at to educate our kids for next year. Due to what I believe is a poor system for funding public schools in California, combined with deep cuts that are currently being proposed by the state, I worry daily that the

district will not be able to offer the type of education that Oak Park parents expect and deserve. However, I also think this is an opportunity for us as individuals and as a group to take care of what is important to us. As a first step I encourage and urge all of you to attend our Education Foundation's (The Friends of Oak Park Schools') annual Fundraiser at the Dole Corporate Headquarters on the evening of May 7. Our Education Foundation is here to support the district and all of us as parents to provide the best possible education for our children.

Barbara Laifman
Oak Park Unified School District Board President