

SCHOOL WATCH

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2017 Edition

OPHS CLASS OF 2017 TOPS THE CHARTS

It seems that every year the current graduating class keeps coming up with a higher average SAT score than the class before. Well, it happened again. This year's seniors had an average SAT score of 1270 out of 1600 and an average ACT score of 28. Students in this class submitted 2238 college applications, an average of 6.7 per student. 96.4% are now enrolled in college!



NEW LED LIGHTS AT OAK PARK STADIUM

You may have noticed that our Friday Night lights look different. Measure S bond funds allowed us to replace our very old stadium lighting system with the newest LED system. The new lights focus the light downward, leaving the night sky dark. The new lights will prevent spill-over into the surrounding homes and community, protect nocturnal wildlife, and reduce electricity consumption, saving the school District over \$15,000 per year in electrical costs.

READING AND WRITING PROJECT UNDERWAY

In the Spring of 2017, the Oak Park USD Board of Education adopted The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project as the literacy program for DK-5 in all elementary schools. Also, known as Reading and Writing Workshop (RWW), this new direction significantly changes the way we approach literacy instruction.



What is Reading Workshop?

In the words of Lucy Calkins, the Columbia University researcher and founder of RWW, "The reading workshop provides a structure to the teaching of reading, one that has been especially designed to make sure that children are given the essentials they need to flourish as readers." Reading Workshop is both a set of beliefs and instructional practices aimed at providing a balanced approach to literacy that includes reading, writing, and speaking.

Why did OPUSD select Reading Workshop?

During the 2016-17 school year, all elementary teachers provided their input as we identified core beliefs and priorities related to our literacy program. This input led to the following priorities for our program:

- We want kids to love to read and write.
- Instruction should be differentiated
- High priority on phonics instruction
- Supports the new CA Standards
- Students choose what they read
- Strong writing program

Based on the pilot, Reading and Writing Workshop (RWW) was identified overwhelmingly as the best match for our priorities. It is important to note that RWW is not a typical or traditional literacy program in that it does not use textbooks, workbooks, or whole class texts.



A Reading Workshop classroom relies on teacher-led instruction in the form of a **mini lesson** which aims to teach a specific reading skill or strategy. The mini lesson is intended to take about 10 minutes. A more significant block of time (30-40 minutes) is devoted to **independent practice**, where students read self-selected books and practice the skill taught in the mini lesson. During this time, the teacher confers with individuals or small groups. This is arguably the most valuable part of workshop, as the teacher is targeting the needs of each student throughout the week. The third portion of Reading Workshop includes time for students to **share what they read** and how they applied the mini lesson to their reading. Depending on the grade level, this sharing can be done as a whole class or in small groups. The above structure will be consistent every day, across all grade levels. Other elements of Reading Workshop include interactive read alouds, book clubs, guided reading, and shared reading.

To support our students and teachers in this new approach to literacy, we have provided the following:

- A total of more than 37,000 books were added to all classrooms in grades DK-5
- Teachers attended an intensive 4-day training over the summer to become familiar with the new approach and materials
- Each school has 2 identified reading coaches; classroom teachers who also provide support to teachers
- Ongoing training – all schools will have 10 days of on-site support with staff developers from Columbia University's Teachers College



WATER AID

We upcharge all water bottles sold in our vending machines and secondary school cafeterias 25 cents. This is done to discourage students from purchasing water bottles, which even if recycled, are rough on the planet, and encouraging them to use the hydration stations that are available at all of the schools. We provide free cups to those that do not have reusable water bottles. Well, the double good news is that water bottle sales are down but we still collected \$1833 in upcharges, which will be sent to Water Aid International, an organization that helps bring fresh water and toilets to people in 38 highly impoverished countries around the world.



SOLAR PANEL RIBBON CUTTING EVENTS

The first Measure S project was the construction of large solar array shade structures at all of our schools. The structures support over 4000 American made panels that will generate over 2 billion watt hours of electricity per year. The projects were completed on time and have been saving us money since July 1. This year, the panels will save the school general fund an estimated \$360,000. Between July 1 and September 24 they have already generated \$110,000 worth of electricity.

The main ribbon-cutting event was held on September 29 at Medea Creek Middle School at 8:30 AM. Each school will have a ceremony as scheduled below:

- Red Oak Elementary School – October 2, 2017 at 8:15 am
- Brookside Elementary School – October 6, 2017 at 8:20 am
- Oak View High School /Oak Park Independent School – October 16, 2017 at 1:00 pm
- Oak Hills School October 23, 2017 at 8:45 am

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT DR. TONY KNIGHT

PARCEL TAX NOT RENEWED – CLASS SIZES RAISED

Measure A was the measure to extend the OPUSD \$197 parcel tax for another five years. The tax has been in place for the past 13 years and expired in June. A 2/3 +1 (66%) vote was required to renew it and in the special all-mail election of May 2, the measure came up short just 25 votes out of over 3,000 votes cast. This means that the \$197 tax will NOT be on your 2017-18 tax bill. Many of our property owners 65+ have filed for exemptions, which are now no longer necessary. Unfortunately, this also means the loss of \$870,000 a year in revenue for our schools. These funds were directly attached to class size reduction at all levels. We have adjusted class sizes upward for the 2017-18 school year due to the loss of this revenue. Even though this was a difficult loss, we thank the Oak Park community for the 13 years of the parcel tax, which brought in over \$11 million in revenue that saw us through some very tough economic times.

COFFEE AND CHAT WITH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Join two OPUSD school Board members for an informal conversation about whatever is on your mind about our schools.

DATE: November, 6, 2017

TIME: 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm

LOCATION: Oak Park
High School, 1 buildings



WHERE DOES OAK PARK USD RANK IN FUNDING?

Under the new state school funding model that began in 2013, which allocates funding based on the types of students a school district serves, Oak Park USD ranks last in Ventura County and in the bottom decile in California out of nearly 1000 districts. Schools that serve higher numbers of students on the Federal Free/Reduced Price Meal Program, English Learners, and Foster Youth, receive significantly more funding, up to 50% more, which has created a tremendous funding disparity among California school districts. OPUSD receives the minimum amount per student as we have few students who are in these groups. Note that districts that receive the higher funding levels also receive large amounts of federal funding, which Oak Park does not receive in any significant amount. Since Proposition 13 was passed in 1978, public schools are funded by the state because local property taxes are insufficient. In Oak Park, the funding formula calls for \$8003 per student, with \$2561 coming from local property taxes and \$5442 from the state or a split of 32% local and 68% state. The state allocates the funding to schools based on the number of students served and the types of students who are served. If there were fewer students, the amount per student does not change but the state contribution per student would be less and the local property tax percentage would be higher, which is one of the reasons why Oak Park benefits greatly from the District of Choice program. School districts may also pass local parcel taxes to increase their revenue, which are beyond the regular property taxes determined by state and county formulas.

Some people have asked us since we just passed a \$60 million bond measure, why is there a funding issue in Oak Park USD? Bond funds may only be spent on building and equipment and cannot be used to hire more teachers or other ongoing expenses. The \$60 million is also a maximum amount of bonds that can be issued over the life of the bond program and are not issued all at once. We have issued \$15 million this year, which must be expended in no more than three years and have \$45 million remaining. The tax rate estimate must be formulated to keep it below \$60 per \$100K of assessed value for each bond measure. The original bonds that built the school district facilities are now paid off. The state provides some matching funds for school modernization IF a school district has local bond funds. We received about \$5 million in state matching funds for Measure R projects when Oak Park High School and Brookside Elementary School were modernized. We are now in the process of applying for modernization funds for Oak Hills, Medea Creek, and Red Oak, that we estimate could total \$10 million. Measure S is allowing us to modernize our schools and ensure that the schools have the latest technology. Measure S passed with 63.5% of the vote last November. Thank You, Oak Park Community!

How Does California Compare?

Education Week's Quality Counts 2017, ranked California 46th out of the 50 states on per student funding.

The U.S. Department of Education ranks California 49th in student to counselor ratio, and 50th – LAST – in student to teacher ratio.



COMMUNITY DOG WALK – SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21 10:00 AM OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL

Oak Park High School students in the club SPAE, Students Protecting Animals and the Environment invite you to bring your dog and a \$10 donation to participate in our Walk for the Dogs. This year all proceeds will be donated to The Humane Society of the United States to support their work related to animal rescues in hurricane ravaged areas. There are thousands of animals that have been affected by the hurricanes. There will be two courses, one short for smaller and older dogs and one that is about a mile for other dogs. All dogs must be on a lead at all times and any waste must be picked up. Entry forms will be available at the event. Cash or checks accepted. Checks should be made out to The Humane Society. Only well socialized/safe dogs should participate in this activity.



CLEANING UP OUR CREEKS

96 volunteers from our schools and community completed a major creek clean up on Saturday, September 16 as part of Coastal Clean Up Day sponsored by Heal the Bay. Our clean up was organized by the OPUSD Environmental Education and Awareness Committee. Not only was 50 pounds of trash, 150 pounds of recyclables, collected but 15 invasive palms and 5,000 pounds of invasive grape vines were also removed.

FAMILY GAME NIGHT FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27 6:00 PM COMMUNITY CENTER

Oak Park USD and Rancho Simi Parks and Recreation are teaming up to present Family Game Night. Everyone is invited. The event will feature giant outdoor games and indoor board games, including Oak Park-Opoly. The event is FREE. Food will be available for purchase.





NEW CLASSROOM FURNITURE

In recent years, classroom instruction has undergone significant changes. While direct instruction (when the teacher delivers information to a large group of students) still takes place, our classrooms are -more than ever- places where students direct their own learning and work collaboratively. Walk into an OPUSD classroom and you will see students working in small groups, others working alone, while others can be seen working directly with the teacher. The ways classroom instruction is organized and delivered have changed dramatically. However, the physical environment of the classroom has undergone little updating in recent years.

With the recent passage of Measure S, OPUSD classrooms have been updated to support the flexible, collaborative, and innovative approaches employed by our teachers and students. We are calling this a change to flexible seating. Over the summer, flexible seating options were purchased for classrooms at all OPUSD schools.

Many of the flexible seating options were part of a trial program that included the use of standing desks, collaborative tables, and student desks that can easily be moved into different configurations. In addition to the different desk options, we also offered varied seating options; from the standard desk chair to high lab stools to 'wobble stools,' which encourage movement and proper posture. At the end of the trial period, which lasted all of last school year, we surveyed students to find what they liked and disliked about flexible seating, and asked for their suggestions as we moved forward. The classrooms, after all, exist for the students- so who better to ask about what should and shouldn't be in the classroom? Teachers in the trial program noted that allowing students to choose their seating gave them ownership over their learning and classroom behavior.

Our students overwhelmingly approved of flexible seating options. Students reflected that they learn in different ways, and appreciate having a choice over the way that they learn. Many students shared that standing desks were a positive addition to the classroom as they allow for students to stand and move around a bit while working. The traditional set-up of desks in rows does not allow for much movement, collaboration, or personalization and this change was universally seen as a positive by teachers, students, and parents. This year, look for many classrooms to have updated flexible seating options for students.

MEASURE S SUMMER PROJECTS

Local school bond revenues may only be used for construction and equipment. Measure S was passed by Oak Park voters last November and we are underway with multiple projects. In addition to the solar arrays installed at each campus, numerous other projects have been completed or are in progress. These include:

- Completely new air conditioning (HVAC) at Oak Hills Elementary and major replacements on buildings Medea Creek Middle School and Oak Park High School. When we replace HVAC, we also do a complete duct cleaning.
- New roofing at MCMS.
- New gym floor at MCMS.
- Replaced structural lumber at MCMS in open areas and new shade sails on the way.
- Replaced blacktop at MCMS basketball court area.
- Replaced ball walls at BES.
- Rescreened the lunch area at OHES.
- New LED stadium lighting at OPHS.
- Added security cameras throughout the District.
- New classroom furniture at many OPUSD classes to be more efficient, comfortable, and compatible with our more inquiry-based teaching and learning model.
- Strategically located fencing added at BES, OHES, ROES, and OPHS.

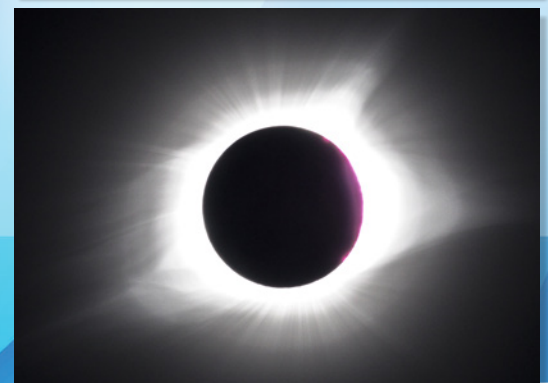
GOALS

An extensive annual goal setting process conducted by the Board has resulted in the following major goals for the year:

- Continued concern about managing and reducing student stress and improving student well-being. Managing homework loads and developing a new districtwide homework policy will be a major theme this year.
- Continuing to implement our inquiry-based, differentiated, critical thinking curriculum in all subject areas and grade levels.
- Expanding the use of the latest technologies at all levels.
- Ensuring there are quality intervention programs at all levels for students needing support in math and reading.
- Better aligning our math programs between middle and high school.
- Teaching and modeling socially responsible behavior including recycling, waste reduction, and conservation of natural resources.
- Expand engineering offerings at OPHS and more Career and Technical Education opportunities.
- Explore a more robust visual arts program for DK-5 by establishing a Visual Arts Committee.
- Add more counseling services at the elementary level by the addition of a half-time counselor.
- Make sure that families and staff understand our financial situation and the need to become more engaged with our Education Foundation to raise the funds that will allow us to reduce class sizes and expand programs that parents want.
- Encourage teachers to visit each other's classrooms both at their school and among schools and levels.
- **Find new ways to give back and enrich our local community.**
- Develop an aggressive plan to replace portable classrooms and further modernize the schools under Measure S starting next summer.
- Further increase safety measures at the schools by better monitoring visitors and controlling access during the school day. Create a new committee focused on security and safety.
- Find new ways to communicate information and increase understanding of curriculum changes, finances, and District organization.

WEATHER BALLOON AND ECLIPSE

92 Oak Park classrooms tuned into the live broadcast of the OPHS Rocket Team weather balloon launch and eclipse totality from Nebraska on August 21. The weather balloon reached an altitude of 114,700 feet and was recovered 60 miles away and only one mile from its projected landing area. The balloon went so high that the cameras stopped working due to the cold but they were still able to capture some amazing photographs from the stratosphere. The OPHS students visited the schools the following week to show students the photos and the equipment used in the project. The project turned into an extensive learning experience for thousands of students in Oak Park. Here are some of the photos taken.





TREES TREES TREES!

Oak Park USD now has 889 trees on our campuses. We have been working hard for many years to plant more and more trees in and around the schools. The Board has now approved a new contract with Four Seasons Tree Care, certified arborists and tree trimming firm to maintain the trees on a scheduled maintenance plan. Our next major planting project will be at Oak Park High School along Kanan Road and Oak Hills Drive. The trees not only beautify our schools and community, provide shade and habitats for wildlife but they absorb CO2 and air pollutants. We estimate that our 889 trees absorb 42,672 pounds of CO2 each year.



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BRING US YOUR RECYCLING!

You may always drop off small electronic waste items such as old cell phones, tablets, and other small electronic devices, printer ink and toner cartridges, and household batteries (place in a Ziploc bag) at all of the schools. These items should never be placed in the trash as they contaminate the environment when dumped in landfills. We will see that they are sent for proper recycling.

Used clothing and anything fabric, shoes, belts, purses, may be placed in the USAgain bins at all of the schools. Did you know that over 80% of used clothing ends up in landfills? USAgain ensures that usable items find new homes and items beyond use are recycled into something new.

Is your flag looking faded and tattered? You may deliver your flags to the school offices and we will send them to a special recycling center. Flags should not be burned for disposal due to the many chemicals that are used in their production these days. Of course, the American flag should never be denigrated by placing it in the trash for disposal.



OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS UPDATE

We have a comprehensive athletic program at Oak Park High School. Our Varsity teams are off to a great start this fall. Here are their stats as of September 28, 2017

Football 2-2 (Homecoming game 10/6)

Girls Volleyball (12-9, 3-0 in league)

Girls Tennis (4-4, 0-1 in league)

Girls Golf (4-4, 4-1 in league)

STAY CONNECTED WITH OAK PARK SCHOOLS

OPUSD wants to connect with you! Follow us as we highlight the great work taking place on our campuses.
Be ready to be awed and inspired by our staff and students.

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