

SCHOOL WATCH

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2015 Edition

FALL SCIENCE EXPLORATORY – SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

Each fall our science specialist, (provided by our education foundation, Friends of Oak Park Schools), organizes special charter trips to bring all of our 5th grade students to Santa Cruz Island in the Channel Islands National Park and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. This year due to El Niño, students were able to experience some atypical marine mammal sightings in the Channel. These included three different species of dolphin: common dolphin, oceanic bottlenose, and Pacific white-sided. One group even sighted all three species in a single day! A hi-light on one of the trips was the spotting of 'patches', an individual bottlenose dolphin named by marine scientists to reflect his/her mottled skin. Patches has been seen in areas south of Ventura County for many years, but observing him/her this far north is unusual. At the island, the children even saw the endemic Santa Cruz Island Fox and a bald eagle on one day. One of the schools, Oak Hills Elementary School, used an inquiry-based approach to the trip where evidence for scientific concepts learned in advance was acquired by photography and then catalogued with the use of iPads. The journey to Santa Cruz Island enables all of our 5th grade students (and their parent chaperones) to become naturalists for the day and to leave the island with a new appreciation for the truly few wild places left on our planet and the great effort it has taken, and will take, to preserve them for future generations.





SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

We publish the SchoolWatch newsletter about three times a year with the intention of keeping the community informed about interesting, important and exciting happenings in your schools. As you will see in this edition, we all have a lot to celebrate and in which to take pride. As a whole, and in comparison to students at the county and state level the students in Oak Park USD are flourishing. Student achievement, being the primary measure of educational quality, is indicative of our students' academic success. Our students did well on the new state testing system based on the New California Standards (Common Core), and were the highest scoring in Ventura County. The new tests are taken entirely on a computer or iPad, requiring the students to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts being tested. Rather than just filling in bubbles, the test is designed to test critical thinking and reasoning in both reading and mathematics. Oak Park USD has embraced this deeper level of teaching and learning for many years, enabling an easier transition to the New California Standards and a greater readiness for the assessments, so it is not surprising that our students did well on this first-time test. We are working hard to implement new standards in every subject and grade level, find materials that match the standards, and provide training for teachers. This is a major undertaking, but one that is taking us further in the right direction.

While our academic accomplishments soar, our level of funding is at the bottom relative to local and statewide districts. OPUSD receives the lowest level of funding, is dead last, out of all the districts in Ventura County. In fact, we rank 850 out of 950 districts in California. This is a result of the new Local Control Funding Formula that brings more funding to schools that serve disadvantaged student populations. Nevertheless, we have received millions more dollars in funding as state revenues have increased and we have been able to keep our enrollment steady through the District of Choice program, an essential factor since state funding has at its basis enrollment by way of average daily attendance. The increased revenues have allowed us to lower class sizes, add counselors, provide salary increases to employees, and build and expand programs. This year we are adding custodians, groundskeepers, and maintenance personnel to help keep our schools clean and looking sharp.

Our enrollment is 4625, which is lower than last year and is by design. We are phasing in reduced class sizes in Grades Kindergarten-3, starting last year with Kindergarten and this year with Kindergarten and first grade. The District of Choice program has kept us financially viable and allowed us to avoid serious cuts during the recession. The consistent enrollment is allowing us to put new state dollars to work improving our programs rather than filling deficits.

As always, thank you for your support. We are a community that places tremendous value on the importance of education and work to ensure that Oak Park Schools will always be a source of pride for the community - a valued resource and asset.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Knight'.

Anthony W. Knight, Ed.D.
Superintendent



OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL TOPS THE NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE RANKINGS

Oak Park High School ranks 120th in the United States and 18th in California, placing us in the top 1%. This ranking is particularly impressive because OPHS is a 'regular' public high school, as opposed to many of the schools on the list which are magnet or charter schools that only accept gifted students or otherwise have selective admission.

According to Newsweek, the criteria for the rankings are as follows:

Ranking Analysis: We surveyed the high schools on both lists identified in the short list analysis for college-readiness data. For those high schools that participated in our survey, we created a weighted College Readiness Index based on the following six indicators:

- College Enrollment Rate—25 percent
- Graduation Rate—20 percent
- Weighted AP/IB/Dual Enrollment composite—17.5 percent
- Weighted SAT/ACT composite—17.5 percent
- Student Retention (change in student enrollment between 9th and 12th grades; this measure is

intended to control for dropout rates)—10 percent
• Counselor-to-Student Ratio—10 percent
To see the entire list of schools visit this website: <http://www.newsweek.com/high-schools/americas-top-high-schools-2015>

How did we compare locally? Here is the local information:

School / County	Rank
Palos Verdes Peninsula High / LA	72
Oak Park High / Ventura	120
Westlake High / Ventura	210
Thousand Oaks High / Ventura	215
Santa Barbara Senior High / Santa Barbara	221
Palos Verdes High / LA	236
Calabasas High / LA	339
Mira Costa High / LA	341
Santa Monica High LA	472
South Pasadena Senior High / LA	460
Granada Hills Charter High / LA	495

SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS

Each year the Board goes through an extensive and inclusive process to revise our Moral Imperatives, Goals, and Action Plans. To view the document please visit our website. <http://www.oakparkusd.org> and look in the column titled, 'About Us'. You can also go directly to <http://www.oakparkusd.org/goals>.

DISTRICT OF CHOICE FAQ'S

Last year our District of Choice program brought in more than \$6 million in revenues to Oak Park USD after taking expenses into account. The program is

one of the key reasons for financial stability and academic success of our schools. To see the figures – how many students, where they come from, and much more, please visit our website – <http://www.oakparkusd.org> and look in the column titled, 'About Us.' We typically have 800-1000 applications to attend our schools each year and accept less than 300. Local realtors tell us that many parents, after bringing their child to our schools in the DOC program, elect to buy a home in Oak Park to end the commute and to become part of our larger community.



ZEN GARDEN RESTAURANT – A TRUE COMMUNITY PARTNER

By Jon Duim – Principal Red Oak Elementary School

When the Zen Garden Chinese Restaurant opened in the Oak Park Shopping Center about two years ago, Red Oak Elementary School conceived a plan to partner with this business to benefit both organizations. 5th grade students district-wide have been learning the Chinese language and culture since securing a federal government grant to provide this instruction. Long after the grant was discontinued, the Oak Park Unified School District found alternate funds to provide continued instruction for this valuable program. China is a growing world economic power, leading trade partner and Pacific neighbor.

Knowledge of the Chinese language and culture will prove invaluable to prepare our students for the world they will live in tomorrow. In the OPUSD, students can pursue language instruction in Chinese from 5th to 12th grades. Red Oak is always looking for ways to apply and enrich what students are learning in the classroom. Collaborating with the Zen Garden Chinese Restaurant seemed like a way to do this with our 5th grade students. Happily, owner Lin Guo, eagerly agreed. Last spring, each of the four 5th grade classes from Red Oak walked, in turn, to the restaurant for a sumptuous lunch. The restaurant staff talked to the students about Chinese culinary customs, proper ways of addressing others and Chinese traditions. Students practiced what they had learned of the Chinese language, used chopsticks for eating and were immersed in Chinese culture. After the meal the restaurant staff taught the students the art of origami.

All of these activities provided students with learning experiences that were authentic and engaging. Each student received an invitation to visit the restaurant with his or her family at a reduced price and the restaurant offered a donation to Red Oak based upon a percentage of the cost of these family meals. The restaurant gained exposure and potential customers and the students gained valuable experience and practice applying their knowledge outside the classroom environment. This type of win-win community partnership is a small example of the many efforts that the OPUSD strives to provide so that our students are prepared for the challenges of the future.



OAK PARK HIGH SCHOOL – Support Programs

Our new counselor, Jenny Charrett has been busy organizing programs at Oak Park High School to address a variety of issues of concern related to adolescents. In honor of National Suicide Awareness Month in October, Oak Park High School offered a program for students and parents. Events and activities included: Symbolic wristbands of “Strength and Hope” were distributed to all teachers and students along with a list of resources and a contact list of our Advanced Peer Counselors. Students were invited to G-9 at lunch to watch the moving story of a former OPHS student Zach Greenwald and his battle with depression and suicidal thoughts followed by a discussion.

The room was full to capacity. Access to the video can be found through the following YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d8MLd18jog>. Teachers were also approved to get Professional Development hours to take an online training series on Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention. Our website has links to additional resources: <http://www.oakparkusd.org/domain/270>.

Our next big event will be Awareness Week, the week of January 11th. Our theme this year will be resilience. There will be classroom presentations, a guest speaker, lunch/after-school activities, and art/writing/multimedia contests all encompassing the resilience theme. We will also be running a 4-part parent support group series of presentations on the topic: “Developing Student Resiliency.”



HALLOWEEN CANDY COLLECTION

We collected a huge amount of candy for donation to Operation Gratitude the week after Halloween. Our children are fortunate to receive bushels of candy on the holiday, and are generous in contributing a large amount through

collections done at the school sites. Operation Gratitude sends the candy to our troops both in the U.S. and abroad. Their motto is Saying "Thank You" to All Who Serve.



AMERICAN RED CROSS LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR HELP IN SCHOOLS

The American Red Cross Ventura Chapter is seeking volunteers who enjoy teaching grade school children about preparedness safety. There are two programs offered:

A Puppet Show, which teaches children about fire safety and earthquake preparedness using puppets and songs.

Additionally, The Pillowcase Project is a preparedness education program for children in grades 3 – 5, which teaches students about personal and family preparedness, local hazards, and basic coping skills. The program leads students through a "learn, practice, share" framework to engage them in disaster preparedness.

Afterward, a sturdy pillowcase is given to each child and they are encouraged to build their personal emergency supplies kit.

Each program requires a bit of (free) training and school hours availability; because of the cost of becoming a Red Cross volunteer, along with the training involved, the Red Cross does ask for a year commitment.

If you are interested, please contact Jinnine Nitschke, Volunteer Services, at Jinnine.Nitschke@redcross.org.



WORLD FOOD DAY

World Food Day was October 16. This day, declared so by the United Nations, is a day to pause and think about world hunger and what we can do to help the 800 million people in the world who are food insecure. In OPUSD we commemorated the day with parent volunteers offering samples of amazingly delicious earth-friendly bean dishes prepared by our cafeteria staff, including Chana Masala, Red Beans and Rice, at all of the schools. We also collected \$257 to give to MANNA, our local food bank, from students at Medea Creek Middle School and Oak Park High School who donated a portion of their lunch money.

MEASURE C PARCEL TAX SENIOR EXEMPTION

The Oak Park Unified School District is accepting requests for Senior Exemptions for the Measure C Parcel Tax. Senior citizens 65 years old or older, or anyone turning 65 during 2015, who live in their home in Oak Park may go to the District's Support Services Office at 5801 E. Conifer Street, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to get an exemption form, or you may call to request a form be mailed to you by calling 818-735-3206.

Seniors must bring to the Oak Park Unified School District Support Services Office the completed and signed form along with your 2015-2016 tax assessment bill with parcel number and address shown and proof of your age. Accepted forms of proof of age are drivers license/State I.D. card, passport or birth certificate. This must be your primary residence, rental properties are not eligible for exemption.

This exemption must be renewed annually in order to maintain eligibility.

CAREER PATHWAYS AT OAK VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

Oak View High School is our continuation high school, in operation since 1982. It has been widely recognized for its quality and innovation.

OVHS has implemented a new internship program this year, with the goal of introducing students to various career pathways for entrance after high school. Many of the options will possibly lead to immediate transitions from school to work. We currently have five internship opportunities available to our students. Three of these classes are directly associated with work done in the school district. Oak View has collaborated with our Maintenance and Operations Department at the OPUSD District Office and with the Balfour Beatty Construction Firm to offer HVAC and Electricity classes. We also have an education



based program where students go to Brookside Elementary School, within our district, to work with elementary teachers and gain exposure to a career in education. In addition to these three internships, this year Oak View High School has received a \$30,000 grant through Ventura County Innovates (VCI). This grant is to offer two new Internship opportunities, one being Digital Graphics and Design Heat Transfers, the other being STEAM Guitar Building and 3D Printing. The purpose of

the Digital Graphics, Design Heat Transfers is to introduce students into the exciting, creative, fun, and profitable business world of Digital Graphics and Decorating, through Dye Sublimation and Vinyl Cutting. In STEAM Guitar Building and 3D Printing, students will build a guitar to learn concepts in engineering from both an artistic perspective and a scientific perspective. Students will be introduced to basic CAD drafting, CNC machining and 3D Printing, which will result in students building their own custom electric guitar.



SUMMER AND FALL TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS @ OAK PARK USD

By Enoch Kwok, Director of Technology

Oak Park Unified School District is fortunate to have a supportive community that has made the resources available to provide a technologically rich teaching and learning environment that will better prepare our students for a fast changing world powered by collaboration and innovation. This article will provide a brief snapshot of recent efforts the district has undertaken to provide a collaborative learning environment where students are at the center of the learning experience through direct interaction with technology instead of being merely passive observers of someone else's use of technology.

OPUSD's educational technology department had a busy summer, refreshing many student computer labs across the district (3 elementary desktop labs, 3 high school computer labs, and adding 6 carts of Chromebooks dedicated for student use), deploying new Google Apps For Education accounts using the district's new OPUSD.US domain for students and OPUSD.ORG domain for staff, bringing on board a second instructional technology specialist – (Teacher On Special Assignment) to help teachers better utilize the technology in their classrooms for instruction, and deploying a new Student Assessment Data Management System to better prepare students for Common Core testing.

The district began the school year with 15 technology lead teachers (TechLITEs) across the district teaching in 1-to-1 mobile computing environments where there are enough iPads or Chromebooks resident in their classrooms to allow each student to have their own mobile computing device. Furthermore, every Kindergarten-5 grade level at the elementary schools has a set of 10 iPads in a learning center to share amongst the grade level. Across the district there are also 21 carts of iPads and Chromebooks (36 devices in each cart) that can be checked out by teachers, and 18 carts of laptops (20 Macbooks each cart) available for check out.

Looking toward the Fall, the district has several more initiatives in the works. Teacher iPads are being re-issued but this time enrolled in the district's remote app management system so that purchased apps can be automatically sent out to teacher iPads (just like

what can already be done on student facing iPads). Next, the district is migrating storage of teacher and staff computer files to the Google Drive platform to enable better collaboration with students and co-workers while also providing an unlimited amount of cloud storage. This will free the district from having to maintain costly, and no-longer-supported by Apple, in-house file sync and backup mechanisms. As the world increasingly relies on storage of data in the "cloud", lowering costs while enabling more efficient collaboration, the district is keeping pace in order to provide students with the types of skills and practices that they will need to master to be successful in college and in the business world they are likely to enter.

Teacher laptops will also be refreshed after 3+ years of service, with the teacher laptops migrating down to refresh the student laptop carts, many of which have computers that have been in service 7-8 years. Lastly, the district will move its email service to the Google Gmail platform, which will allow teachers to utilize Google Apps For Education to manage student work and communicate with students within the same collaboration environment. Moving the email service to the Google Gmail platform will also relieve the district from having to maintain or replace aging and over-capacity email servers. After the migration, district staff will be reachable from the same @oakparkusd.org email address, or a new, shorter @opusd.org email address. Both will point to the same email box.

Once these Fall initiatives are completed, the district will then work on expanding student access to additional mobile devices in the classrooms. Providing every elementary classroom with its own resident iPad Learning Center of 10 iPads will be a top priority, as will adding additional carts of iPads and Chromebooks to the middle and high school for checkout.

The community is encouraged to follow the district's social media feeds @oakparkusd in order to see glimpses of the innovative learning that is occurring in the classrooms at

www.facebook.com/oakparkusd
or www.twitter.com/oakparkusd



Alternatively, one can search for the social media topic #opshares

Thank You Oak Park for your generous support and encouragement of a technologically rich education environment!



NEW GARDEN SPECIALIST IN OAK PARK SCHOOLS

October saw the launch of our new preschool, elementary, and middle school garden education program. The program is linked to Common Core Standards (New California

Standards) and Next Generation Science Standards, and is delivered by a team of school garden instructors from 2eden design.garden.grow!

The program kicked off with the roll-out of six weeks of garden instruction for all Discovery Kindergarten-1st Grade students at each of our elementary schools. Garden instruction also began at the Oak Park Neighborhood Preschool and, the 2eden team is mentoring the Garden Club at Medea Creek Middle School.

We are three weeks into the first block of teaching and our students (and their teachers!) are enjoying getting their hands dirty learning about germination, making compostable seed trays from recycled grocery bags, learning how to mix the best soil for seed starting and how to 'broadcast' cool season organic vegetable seeds including beets, radish, spinach, lettuce, chard, kale and broccoli. Whilst our budding green thumbs

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NEW GARDEN SPECIALIST IN OAK PARK SCHOOLS *(continued from previous page)*

wait for their sprouts to grow big enough for transplanting into our school gardens, lessons have progressed to identify six parts of a plant (roots, stem, leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds) and the difference between fruits and vegetables.

Discovery Kindergarten-1st Grade students are scheduled to complete the six-week garden unit before winter break. The program will then rollout to 2nd and 3rd Grade in January-March 2016 and, 4th and 5th Grade in mid-late March next year.





COMMUNITY READ WONDER

We held our first community-wide “read” and selected the book, *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. The book is about a child with a physical deformity and the challenges he faces both in school, and life in general. The book acknowledges the complexities that can arise in “choosing” kindness and compassion, and very poignantly describes the positive impact on others, ourselves, and our world when that choice is made and acted upon. After encouraging and allotting time for the book to be read, we then came together to discuss the book and share ideas. Many thanks to Medea Creek Middle School teacher Kathy Mosley for leading an outstanding discussion of *Wonder*. We look forward to reading a new book together next summer and hope you will join us.



GOLD RIBBON SCHOOLS

Medea Creek Middle School and Oak Park High School both received the California Gold Ribbon Schools Award last May, the first year of the program’s inception which began with the cycle of secondary schools. Each school was selected for a ‘signature practice.’ OPHS for its innovative science program, and MCMS for its Inquiry Based Learning project enhanced by professional development from the UCLA Critical Thinking Institute.

LUNCHTIME ENRICHMENT AT BROOKSIDE

With the financial support and coordination of our PTA, Brookside Elementary provides a diverse set of enrichment options for students to enjoy during their lunchtime. These enrichment programs serve to enhance our students' interests outside of the classroom and to promote our district's mission statement of educating compassionate and creative global citizens by fostering collaboration, creativity, ingenuity, and character development. Programs are open to all students and run on a drop-in basis.

We currently offer five options for students:

- **CReATE on Your Campus:** In collaboration with CReATE Art Studio in Westlake Village, we offer our students the opportunity to exercise their creativity through the use of recycled school materials. Students "revel in fun and funky DIY art." This allows students to think out of the box and explore through open-ended artistic strategies.
- **littleBITS:** littleBits are small, simple, intuitive, blocks that make creating with sophisticated electronics a matter of snapping small magnets together. littleBits offer our students an open source library of electronic modules that snap together with tiny magnets for prototyping, learning, and fun. Students explore circuitry using tiny circuit-boards with specific functions, including light, sound, sensors, buttons, thresholds, pulses, motors, and more.
- **LUNCHTIME LIBRARY BOOK CART:** Students have the option of sitting and enjoying a book alone or with a friend from our lending library.
- **LEGO BUILDZONE:** Students simply love the projects they build each week with various LEGO bricks and elements. Our BuildZone promotes teamwork, cooperation, patience, and problem solving skills.



- **MASTERS OF THE PLAYGROUND:** Students experience team building through play via structured playground games coordinated by specialist coaches. Activities build strong hand/eye coordination, increase gross motor skill development, teach strategic thinking, and promote collaboration. Students participate in AMAZING and FUN games each week to get students moving and working together!

Through these additional free play options, Brookside students remain engaged in structured activities while exploring their interests and discovering their talents.



BRING US YOUR RECYCLABLES THAT CAN'T GO IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD COLLECTION BINS

FLAG RECYCLING

Oak Park Schools proudly fly our flags every day. After a while they become faded and sometimes tattered. It can be considered disrespectful to fly worn out flags. What to do with them? You may bring your flag to any of our schools and drop it off for recycling. We send the flags to be respectfully recycled. It would be great if you would donate \$5 for each flag to help pay for the recycling costs but we will accept the flags without a donation as a service to the community.

SMALL ELECTRONICS RECYCLING AND BATTERIES

You are welcome to bring small electronic devices to any of the school offices and place them in the 'Green Hippo' recycling container. These include phones, laptops, and other small electronics. You may also place household batteries in the containers as long as they are sealed in zip-lock bags. The schools will receive funds for the electronics but not for the batteries. It is important NOT to throw these items away in your trash as they will contaminate the landfills. These items are not to be placed in your household recycling containers either. Just bring them to us.



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RECYCLE CLOTHING

80% of all clothing and textiles end up in local landfills, which are filling up. Please drop your used clothing, textiles, or any accessories in our USAgain green and white bins located at all of our schools. These are offered as a community service to help the environment, and to give a second life to our fabrics. Our Environmental Education and Awareness Committee receives funds for these to use on various education projects at all of the schools. Thank You!

ANNUAL COMMUNITY RECYCLING EVENT – FEBRUARY 6

We are planning a BIG recycling event as part of our annual Sustainability Fair on Super Saturday, February 6. You can save up and bring us your large electronics at that event. We will also be accepting other goods that should never go to a landfill (or down the drain/toilet), including: paper for shredding on site, unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications, unwanted glasses, CDs and DVDs and their cases.