

School News

Belmont-Redwood Shores School District

Volume 1, Issue 3

School Board

- Eric Shrader, President
- Karen Clancy, Vice President
- Cathy Wright, Clerk
- M.J. Crousore
- Sharon Thompson

Next board meeting:
Thursday, June 2, 6:30
p.m., at the District Of-
fice, 2960 Hallmark
Drive in Belmont.

School Calendar

May 30, 2005

Memorial Day, no school

June 17, 2005

*Last day of school, K-8
minimum day*

Aug. 31, 2005

*First day of school, K-5
minimum day; 6-8 full day*

Superintendent's Letter

Thank you for reading this issue of *School News*. As usual, we've been busy at the District Office and would like to inform you of the following developments:

Governor's Budget: Governor Schwarzenegger's new initiatives for public schools and his proposed budget for 2005-06 were truly astonishing to the educational community. The governor's education proposals call for better accountability and higher student achievement but fail to address that California will fall even farther behind the national average for state spending on schools. A recent "Quality Counts 2005" report by *Education Week* notes that California ranked 44th in the nation in per-pupil spending but earned a B+ for its standards and



Superintendent John McIntosh

accountability system. A report by the Public Policy Institute of California also identifies California as ranking highest in academic standards and accountability systems in the nation. Clearly, the expectations for our schools are high, but the funding for them has hit rock bottom.

The Educational Coalition—consisting of the California School

Boards Association, the California Teachers Association, the California School Employees Association, and the Association of California School Administrators—was particularly shocked by Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed budget. Last year an agreement was reached to suspend Proposition 98 (minimum level of funding for education) for purposes of balancing the budget. As a part of that agreement, the governor committed to the Coalition that schools would be spared cuts in future years. He announced: "Education is the key to every future success of our state. This Proposition 98 funding will be restored as required by law and our agreement. Today I am

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New Writing Program Coming this Fall

Writing is thinking. When students write, they reflect analyze and reconsider. Developing writing skills means developing thinking skills, which will help children grow into thoughtful, reasoning adults.—Research Base, Great Source Education Group

Our district's 2004-05 Strategic Plan and Goals, adopted by the Belmont-Redwood Shores School

District Board of Trustees, includes a focus on the improvement of student writing. The goal put forth in the plan is that all students will meet or exceed grade-level standards in writing. In order to achieve this goal, the District has engaged, over the course of this past year, in an ongoing conversation about the development of a district ap-

proach to the teaching of writing. Administrators and teachers have examined writing programs and the research base for effective writing instruction, consulted with experts in the field of writing instruction, and visited writing programs in local school districts.

In building a district approach to

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Writing, continued from Page 1



the teaching of writing,, teachers will receive professional development in the “Six-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction” model in August. Follow-up and enhancement to this two-day intensive training will take place throughout 2005-06.

The workshop our teachers will attend, called *Write Traits*, is used in schools across the country to implement and achieve district writing standards. The six traits of writing are: Ideas, Voice, Sentence Fluency, Organization,

Word Choice, and Conventions.

In the workshop and the planned follow-up, our teachers will learn the six traits, become familiar with trait language, and learn how the traits support writing process-based instruction. They also will learn how to teach creative as well as informational writing.

During the next school year, the District will seek to involve parents by providing the opportunity to learn about the six traits. We will also help them learn specific ways they can work with their

students using the six traits.

As we work together as a district on the implementation of this model, we will continually evaluate the impact it has on the improvement of student writing. We will also continue to investigate and consider other elements that might be added to our instructional program to further increase our effectiveness in teaching writing.

We’ll keep you posted on our progress.—*Jeannie Bosley*

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making that promise to our teachers and students.” As you know, the governor has broken his promise and proposes to reduce funding for K-12 public education by more than \$3 billion per year.

As the District begins the development of the budget for 2005-06, we recognize that the governor’s proposal regarding state aid to schools is of less consequence to the Belmont Redwood Shores School District than most other districts in California. As a basic aid district whose principal funding source is property taxes, state funding is a smaller portion of the overall budget. However, some provisions of the governor’s proposal will have a serious impact on our budget. Those provisions include a requirement that districts provide a greater contribution to employee retirement programs, as well as a cut to categorical programs. These two elements alone will result in a projected \$500,000 impact on our 2005-06 budget through increased expenditures and reduced revenues.

Bond Measure for New School in the Shores: Steps are underway in

the Board of Education’s plan to place a School Facilities Improvement District (SFID) bond measure on the ballot for building a much-needed second school in Redwood Shores. A committee of community residents has been meeting with me, other district officials, and a consultant to discuss the plan for the new school. This group also established a campaign committee, which will be ready to act if the Board decides to move forward with the SFID.

A polling firm, Decision Research, was retained by the District to conduct a feasibility poll for placing the SFID on the ballot. The poll, conducted the weekend of April 9-10 and presented to the Board at its April 21 meeting, showed that voters in Redwood Shores overwhelmingly support funding for a new school there. In fact, a 72% majority of voters support a bond measure to fund a new school in Redwood Shores, far surpassing the 55% majority needed to pass such a facilities measure. The SFID encompasses the Sandpiper attendance boundaries and would generate \$30 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation of all property

east of 101 in Redwood Shores.

The Board may take formal action to place the SFID on the November ballot at a special Board meeting on June 23.

2004-05 Strategic Plan and Goals:

We have been very busy striving to achieve our district’s 2004-05 Strategic Plan and Goals. We have three specific areas of focus: Student Learning, Resources, and Communication. This year our areas of need and focus for individual students, sub-groups of students, and school-wide programs will be determined through district and school site analysis of both local student achievement information and the STAR test. Students have taken district assessments in math and writing. Benchmark assessments in reading are also standard district wide. We use beginning-, middle- and end-of-year assessments to determine student progress towards the State Content Standards. Additionally, we have been developing a system of strategies to support all students in meeting grade-level standards. At each school we have a *Single Plan for Student Achieve-*

“We have worked hard this year on some very difficult issues. That hard work, however, has created positive opportunities and long-term gains for our students, our staff, and our school community”—John McIntosh

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ment that addresses the needs of students who have not yet met grade level standards.

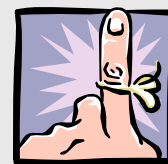
The strategic goals in the Resources area of focus include revenue enhancements through a parcel tax; supporting the work of our outstanding education foundation, School-Force; grants; shared services with other districts; and advocacy for funding for public education at the state and local level. Our efforts have been successful as the 2005-06 district budget is close to being balanced at this writing. Thanks to the voters who supported Measure G, we will be able to bring back some programs that have been cut in prior years. We will have two fully funded 4th and 5th grade science specialists, reading specialists, 4th and 5th grade music, libraries staffed at pre-2002 levels, continued class size reduction in grades K-3, and a fair and equitable compensation package for our teach-

ers. We have much to be thankful for as our children are receiving a well-rounded, high-quality education.

Strategic goals in Communication are progressing, but we still have more work to do. However, we have established regular meetings with the Belmont City Council and Redwood City Council, and with homeowners' associations in Belmont and Redwood Shores. We have also conducted four town hall meetings, held board meetings at all six of our schools, and held study sessions on the budget, enrollment, and our strategic goals. We are publishing the new *School News* quarterly, and we're submitting monthly articles in the *Pilot*. The Board has adopted a complete revised and updated set of board policies, and it has launched Agenda Online, which allows the public to go to the District website at www.belmont.k12.ca.us and access the Board meeting agendas and min-

utes. Soon we will have the new board policies online, which will be updated regularly. We are still working on a web-based communication system that will allow the schools and the District to communicate electronically with parents and community members. The system also will improve our responsiveness to your questions and emails.

We have worked hard this year on some very difficult issues. That hard work, however, has created positive opportunities and long-term gains for our students, our staff, and our school community. As superintendent, I would like to personally thank each of you for your involvement and support in the process of making Belmont-Redwood Shores an outstanding school district. Please encourage your students to work hard through the last day of school and then enjoy the much deserved summer break.—*John McIntosh*



The first day of school for the 2005-06 school year begins Wednesday, August 31. It will be a minimum day for grades K-5, but a full day for grades 6-8.

See you then!

Board President's Notes

I'd like to try to clear up some of the confusion about the state budget and how it affects us. As many of you know, we are a "basic aid" district, which means we get the majority of our funding from local property taxes. *So why do we care what Sacramento does with its budget?* The state budget affects us by changing the amount and ways that we can spend the money that we *do* get from the state, which is between 30-40% of our budget.

This year, for example, Governor Schwarzenegger is proposing that the state stop payments into the State Teachers' Retirement System (STRS). In the past, STRS has been funded by the teachers, by the district, and by the state. If the state were to stop its contribu-

tion, it would cost our district about \$238,000 each year.

Not only does the proposed state budget not restore the \$2 billion owed to education, but it also comes with a series of proposals to allow the governor additional powers over the budget. Under these initiatives, he could suspend Prop 98—without seeking approval from the legislature—and spread the money owed for the suspension over 15 years instead of restoring it in the next year.

These proposals will weaken an educational system that is already 44th in the nation for per-pupil spending and dead last in the nation for the overall ratio of adults to children in schools, according to the latest Rand report. California educates 1/8 of the nation's

children, and I think it deserves the funds—today—that will enable us to educate them effectively.

There are some bright spots, however. On a recent trip to Sacramento, several of us met with an organization that lobbies on behalf of school districts, and its take was that the governor's steep decline in popularity was going to make it increasingly difficult to push his agenda. The group also believes that Californians are increasingly more willing to spend money on education than to tighten the budget. You can help by participating in the letter writing campaign to our representatives in Sacramento.

It is going to be another long, hot summer wrangling over the budget.—*Eric Shrader*



"Good children's literature appeals not only to the child in the adult, but to the adult in the child."—Anonymous

School News

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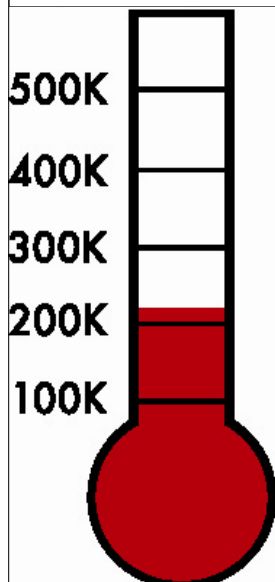
Suggestion Box

School News is a publication of the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District. We are interested in hearing what you would like to see in this newsletter. Is there an issue you would like us to address? Do you have a question about a school district policy or a decision?

Please email us at schoolnews@belmont.k12.ca.us. We'd be happy to hear from you.

2004-2005 Goal

\$600,000



School-Force Update

The school year has started winding down, and as of mid-May we have raised \$230,000 for our schools!

We'd sincerely like to thank Keiko Smith and the team of parents who organized our 2nd annual Reading Power read-a-thon. A total of \$32,000 has been raised through the Reading Power event so far...and the checks are still coming in. Thank you to all the families and students who participated!

Looking back at where we were with our fundraising efforts last year at this time, it's clear that this year we are behind in the dollar amounts that we've raised to date. This could have significant consequences for the pro-

grams that School-Force is able to fund during the next school year. The good news, however, is that we have a large number of families that pledged in our February phone-a-thon that we still are expecting to hear from. If we do hear from them, we're optimistic that we can at least raise the same amount as last year, which was \$328,000.

If you have not already donated to School-Force this year, we ask you for your support by making a family donation of \$333. Your donation could help us qualify for a \$15,000 match that has been offered for all new donations or increased donations over the previous year! Please send in your check by June 30th to School-Force, PO

Box 5196, Belmont, CA 94002.

—Nicola Weiskopf



School-Force is the volunteer-run Belmont-Redwood Shores nonprofit educational foundation that benefits children attending our K through 8 public schools. Decisions on funding allocations are made by the School Board.

Donations to School-Force, a 501(c)(3) organization, are deductible as charitable contributions (Tax ID #91-2159650). Contact School-Force at info@school-force.org or visit us on the web at www.schoolforce.org.

Respect Reigns at Ralston

Go to any middle school at lunchtime and you'll see a group of kids who are so happy to be out of their classes that they sometimes get a little out of control. But go to Ralston Middle School at lunchtime and you'll see something different: You'll see a group of kids who know what's expected of them and how to treat each other and the adults on campus with respect.

"Our expectation is that the kids will behave themselves," says Principal Maggie O'Reilly. "And they do. It's a pretty amazing group of kids." On any given school day, Mrs. O'Reilly joins Vice Principal David Schrag and Dean of Students Brett Stevenson on the yard from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. to manage lunch.

The three administrators, all new this year to Ralston, keep things calm and organized at lunchtime with the help of teachers Mr. Colt,

Mr. McDaniel, and Mrs. Rand. They've made it clear to the students that they mean business, but they've also made it clear that they can have fun. Mr. Schrag, for example, often sets up a sound system and has the kids (and himself) show off their latest hip-hop dance moves.

In addition to being around the kids as often as possible, the new administration continually and clearly communicates its expectations to the students. At the beginning of the year, for example, the school held three assemblies—one for each grade level—at which the three administrators very clearly explained to the students what they expected of them—inside of class and outside of class. Throughout the year, the administration visits the homerooms and classrooms to talk about important issues. Recently, they went to all the 8th grade English classes to encourage the students in their last semester at Ralston to stay on track and to finish the year strong.

Says Principal O'Reilly: "Brett and David have very high standards that are shared with the kids, and they're modeling those standards all the time. Their interactions are always positive and respectful."

"We're constantly looking at innovative and proactive ways to handle discipline," says Principal O'Reilly. "We're not just fighting fires; we're trying to prevent them." One of the

ways the administration handles discipline is to have kids who continually are getting into trouble sign behavior contracts. "We also let all the kids know that they can voice their concerns and their needs," she adds.

Another goal of the new administration is to communicate more effectively with the school community—parents, in particular. This year, there have been two instances of drug use on campus: one involving the misuse of a prescription drug, the other involving the use of an inhalant. The administration dealt with both problems quickly and decisively. In each instance, the administration went to all the homeroom classes to discuss the problem with the students and to educate them about the very real dangers of drug use. Principal O'Reilly also wrote a letter to the parents to tell them what had happened at the school and how to talk to their children about it.

O'Reilly, Schrag, and Stevenson also spend a great deal of time working with the teachers on their instructional practices. "When the three of us came here," says Principal O'Reilly, "we realized that the staff expected more of a presence from us." Adds Mr. Schrag: "They were looking for instructional leadership and more visibility in the classroom, so we're in the classrooms often, working with them. Our ultimate goal is to make the teachers the best that they can be."

Not many middle schools have three administrators, points out Mr. Stevenson, but Superintendent McIntosh recognized the need at Ralston for strong leadership and asked the Board of Trustees to commit the resources to make that happen. "Ralston has 900 students," adds Principal O'Reilly. "It's an amazing luxury to have three administrators in a middle school, but the District saw it as a priority." She adds that the administration's top priority next year will be to continue working closely—in the classroom and out of the classroom—with the students and the staff. In addition, a new bullying program recently was introduced and will be presented next year, and there will be more extracurricular activities for students.

"I love my job," says Principal O'Reilly. "There are three things about it that make it great: the kids, having a professional and creative staff, and these two guys that I work with. They're full of energy and enthusiasm." —Jill Aldrich



Principal Maggie O'Reilly



Vice Principal David Schrag



Dean of Students Brett Stevenson

School News

Belmont-Redwood Shores School District

2005-2006 Calendar

August

- Aug. 31: *First day of school for students. Minimum day for grades K-5; full day for grades 6-8.*

September

- Sept. 5: *Labor Day. No school.*

November

- Nov. 11: *Veterans' Day. No school.*
- Nov. 15, 17, 18, 21, 22: *Parent conferences/minimum days for grades K-5.*
- Nov. 24 & 25: *Thanksgiving Recess. No school.*

December

- Dec. 19-30: *Winter Break. No school.*

January

- Jan. 2: *Staff development day. No school.*
- Jan. 3: *Students return from Winter Break.*
- Jan. 16: *Martin Luther King Day. No school.*

February

- Feb. 20-24: *Mid-Winter Break. No school.*

March

- Mar. 14, 16, 17, 20, 21: *Parent conferences/minimum days for grades 1-5.*
- Mar. 31: *Cesar Chavez Day. No school.*

April

- Apr. 10-14: *Spring Break. No school.*

May

- May 29: *Memorial Day. No school.*

June

- June 16: *Last day of school for students. K-8 minimum day.*