

REPORTER

SPECIAL EDITION

A Newsletter for Parents and Community

March 2010



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The Sulphur Springs District Office is located at 27000 Weyerhaeuser Way, Canyon Country, CA 91351-4947. Board of Trustees Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 P.M.

The Public is invited!
Visit our Web Page at
www.sssd.k12.ca.us

Interest Sparked in Science

A child once reported, "H₂O is hot water and CO₂ is cold water." This child evidently had not spent time in a science lab having the chance to learn firsthand about the properties of water. Students in the Sulphur Springs School District have the chance to visit a Science Lab weekly to experiment, collect data and draw conclusions.

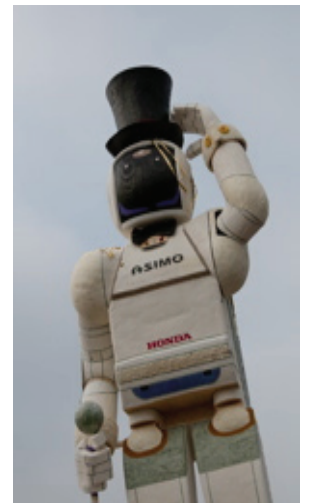
Sulphur Springs School District's Board of Trustees visited the P.T.A. and Community supported Science Lab at Sulphur Springs School several years ago and said, "We need science labs in all of our schools!" By the 2004-2005 school year science labs began in each of the district's schools. These state-of-art science labs were funded through the use of one time funds.

The basic plan for each science lab includes lab tables and stools, an interactive white board, computer and projection system, computers for students to record their data on, along with a refrigerator, dishwasher and the necessary science equipment to provide hands on learning for the students. Each school site personalized their science labs with some adorning the walls with murals of key science curriculum painted by students and staff.

Making science come alive is one of the greatest ideas we can provide to children who have a natural curiosity about the world around them and how it works. Science experiments in the classroom are often too difficult to provide. In the Science Labs everything is on hand, students are motivated and excited to explore and experiment, to develop their own hypothesis and see if their conclusions are correct or not --- learning all the while from the experience.

California began testing 5th grade students each spring as part of the STAR (Student Testing and Accountability) Program. The tests covered the science standards taught in 4th and 5th grades. The first year the results were published (2004) 30% of Sulphur Springs School District's 5th graders scored at the Advanced or Proficient level. By 2009, with Science Labs being in use for nearly five years, 63% of the 5th graders scored at the Advanced or Proficient level.

A hallmark of pride for the students and staff has been the Science Labs at each of the schools. Time spent there makes science come alive for students and provides them with an enriched experience.



Tradition of Responsible Budget Management

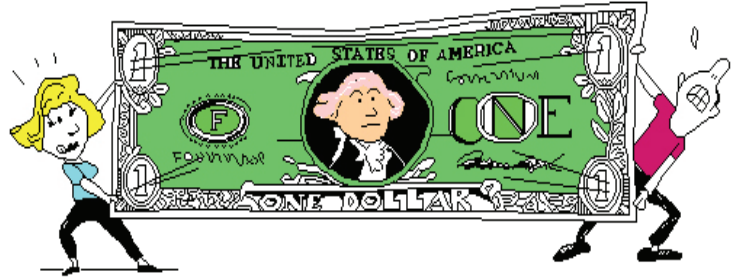
We are proud that at Sulphur Springs Union School District, accountability and strong budget management are a top priority. By maintaining accountability, leveraging outside resources, and reducing spending, we are able to continue to provide a quality educational program for our students.

Accountability and Transparency

Over 80% of funding for our local schools comes from the State. Despite significant State budget cuts in recent years, we have balanced our budget every year since at least 1967, which is when our historical records begin.

Fiscal transparency is critical to ensuring the community is aware of our expenditures. We welcome input from the community on priorities and long-term goals. To ensure accountability, annual public audits are conducted and we have a community budget review.

Given our dependency on the State and the likelihood that State budget cuts will continue over the next several years, SSSD has developed a sound, long-term fiscal plan that identifies funding sources to meet all of our local educational needs. This will allow us to plan for the future and maintain funding for key programs and services.



Leveraging Outside Resources

Identifying and securing sources of funding outside of the State and Federal Government is key to maintaining a long-term stable school district. We continually work to leverage outside resources to provide funding for programs and services.

In the past five years alone, our schools have qualified for over \$3.6 million in competitive grants. These grants help to support state preschools, after school programs, community-based English language tutoring, school gardens, and the SCV foundation teacher incentive grants. We are fortunate to have this critical funding to support our programs. Had we not applied for and secured these grants, this funding would have otherwise gone to other districts.

The District has also been able to generate revenue on its own. Former school sites that were no longer being used for students or classrooms have now been converted. These sites are now generating ongoing revenue for the district that helps provide stable funding for classroom instruction and programs.

Partnerships with local businesses have also helped to improve school facilities. Two new schools in our district were paid entirely by local developers. With more families moving to our community and an increasing student enrolment, we project that two additional schools may be needed in coming years. We are currently working to develop agreements that would allow these two new schools to also be paid by the developers and at no cost to the school district.

Tightening our Belt

In addition to managing our budget tightly and securing additional resources, our District has also modified our programs and services so we are more efficient and save on cost. For example, by implementing energy and water reduction policies, in 2008-09 our district saved \$240,000 in electricity fees and \$15,000 in gas fees. A new district-wide recycling program was recently implemented, and we anticipate it will save the District up to \$16,000 each year. The installation of security systems and cameras at all of our sites has reduced vandalism, which has resulted in a 66% reduction in the cost of vandalism repairs. We continue to look for additional opportunities to cut costs while still maintaining excellent programs.

Providing Quality School Facilities and Academic Programs

Due to the District's ability to manage its budget, we have been able to continue to provide an exceptional program for our students. In recent years, school classrooms and facilities have been modernized without the need for additional local tax dollars. For example, all schools in our district have state-of-the-art science labs and computer labs that support academic achievement, which were all built without funding from local taxpayers.

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Academic Success - Not as Easy as 1 - 2 - 3

Sulphur Springs School District prides itself in educating the whole child. This primary focus for all partners in the education of Sulphur Springs School District students has not changed over the years even with the additional charges placed upon achievement by the state and federal government through No Child Left Behind.

The bar has been set high by the legislation written in No Child Left Behind but students and staff have risen to meet the academic challenge. Since the inception of No Child Left Behind and the increased accountability to the state and federal government, test scores have risen in our schools. Instruction is focused on the standards that need to be mastered each year.

Sulphur Springs School District now has 7 of its schools that have achieved the state's goal of an Academic Performance Index (API) score of 800 set for all schools in the state. The district's API scores range now from 804 to 893. The two schools that have not yet reached this goal are getting closer with their increase in API scores of 8 and 18 points last year. One school in the district increased their API score by 34 points in 2009. The state designates "sub-groups," students in special populations such as English Learners, and assigns them an API score as well. In 2009 the special sub-groups had API score growth of 34 to 47 points – quite an achievement!

"Teachers work tirelessly to provide the best instruction so that all students in their care learn and are successful. Everyone works to make sure every single child succeeds." stated Kathy Harris, Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services.

The scores are based on the annual STAR test taken each spring and improvement does not happen without hard-working staff, training, a solid plan of delivering instruction, supportive parents and students who want to learn and achieve. Since the beginning of the STAR tests in 1998 staff have focused their efforts on providing standards-based instruction with the goal of having all students achieve their grade level standards. It has taken many efforts from a teacher-developed plan of what to teach and when, special training and a focused effort to achieve the goal of having all students succeed. One practice put into place has been the Early Tuesday Release, students are dismissed an hour early from school and the time is made up for by adjusting the daily schedule each remaining day. This extra time provides the staff throughout the district with an opportunity to learn new programs, strengthen skills, focus on ways to improve learning, and plan effective lessons.

Another change that has taken place in the last two years is that each school has developed a goal of improving reading comprehension based on their own student's needs. Progress towards achieving this goal is reviewed frequently at the classroom and school level as well as at the district level. With the entire district's efforts focused on improving reading comprehension improvement in students' reading scores was evident. The number of students in grades 2, 3, and 4 that scored at the Advanced or Proficient level in English Language Arts increased by 4% from 2008 to 2009. The singular instructional goal has helped everyone focus their efforts and keep from getting too scattered in the training that is offered and the instruction delivered in the classrooms. All subjects are taught with special emphasis on improving reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a critical skill that supports student learning now and into the future as well as helping students achieve more success in other academic subjects such as science and history.



These efforts to support the students within the Sulphur Springs School District are not without their challenges, but it is evident the teachers and staff at each school care about their students' success and do all they can to support this academic success.



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All schools in our district have been modernized or renovated since 1990. In addition, Canyon Springs, Leona Cox, Sulphur Springs and Valley View have each gone through a second modernization in the last ten years. All of these modernizations were accomplished without seeking additional funding from taxpayers.

We appreciate the support and cooperation we receive from the community. With your help, we are able to provide our students with an exceptional education.

Family GATE Night

The Sulphur Springs School District Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Program focuses on providing students with a differentiated curriculum within the classroom setting. Teachers accomplish this by using strategies to add depth and complexity to content, stressing creative thinking and research skills, and allowing students to demonstrate learning with unique products. Annually, our district GATE students are able to put their learning on display at the Sulphur Springs District Family GATE Night.



This year's GATE Program is centered on the Universal Theme of CHANGE. GATE students had the opportunity to explore and develop an understanding of what influences CHANGE in the areas of history, science, literature, and mathematics, as well as looking at the world in which we live. On Thursday, April 1st at 7pm, student projects will be on display at Fair Oaks Ranch Community School to showcase student-learning experiences in which grade level standards served as the foundation for in depth investigation. Students used a differentiated unit of study allowing them to incorporate a variety of research and critical thinking skills, and apply various dimensions of depth and complexity to create authentic products. GATE Night is always a wonderful opportunity to see what our young students have been learning during the school year!

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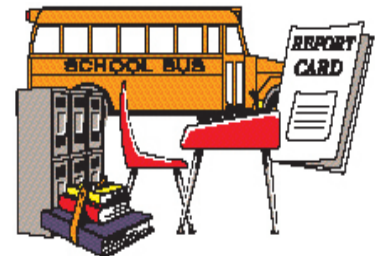
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Comment Card

Please mail this comment card to our District Office or simply fax to (661) 252-6849

The Sulphur Springs School District is very interested in knowing your thoughts regarding any of the topics we've covered in this newsletter or any other questions or ideas that you may have.



(Optional) Contact name: _____ Phone () _____