

NEWS FROM SCHOOL BOARD DIRECTOR JODY LONDON AUGUST 2010

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Great Things in Oakland Schools

I want to start this newsletter by sharing with you some of the many good things happening in our neighborhood schools. In my conversations in the community, people are often surprised when I share with them the strides occurring throughout Oakland. We are rightly proud of our schools that are regularly recognized. I also want to make sure you are aware of what is happening in *all* our schools, and over time will highlight more of them. This time I'd like to share with you the great strides happening at **Piedmont Avenue Elementary School** and **Far West High School**.

Mark Your Calendar!

District 1 TOWN HALL

MEETING WITH

SUPERINTENDENT

SMITH

Tuesday, September 28, 2010
7:00 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.
Piedmont Avenue Elementary School
4314 Piedmont Avenue
Oakland, California

Piedmont Avenue Elementary School

At Piedmont Avenue Elementary, **Principal Zarina Ahmad** is heading into her third year with a clear vision for preparing students to be college-bound. In her first year, Mrs. Ahmad focused on establishing a college-going culture and core character values. All classrooms are now named after colleges and universities and the school holds weekly culture assemblies to promote college culture and school core values. The school makes learning relevant for students with the saying “Your future is now.” Piedmont Avenue has had students from San Jose State, U.C. Berkeley, and other colleges come speak, answer questions, and perform. In addition to college-going culture, the school’s focus on respect for diversity and multicultural learning make the school a positive and safe place for students

For 2009-10 Mrs. Ahmad’s focus switched to academics. She has made it one of her hobbies to study schools that are successful. Piedmont Avenue extends the learning day through its afterschool program, providing teachers time to collaborate, and using student engagement strategies. The school has improved its curriculum in both math and language arts, giving

students time to read in grade level groups while using reciprocal teaching strategies by asking each other questions about the stories as they read. Piedmont Avenue’s spring benchmark scores – prior to the mandatory state testing – showed great improvement.

Far West High School

Far West is a small, college prep high school with an arts focus. **Principal Beverly Jarrett** is starting her fourth year with clear progress in helping teenagers focus on learning. Last year Far West launched an academy program in Art and Fashion Design through the California Partnership Academy program (a state grant program). The school is located on Broadway, directly across from the California College of the Arts (“CCA”) on Clifton Street. Far West takes advantage of this proximity to CCA through partnership.

Ms. Jarrett is very focused on promoting college readiness. Far West students participate in the **College Summit**, a summer program that helps kids learn more about what they will need to do to qualify for and apply to college. The kids then go back to their schools with a commitment to be peer leaders. This fall, students from Far West will be enrolling at Cornell University, U. C. Berkeley, U.C. Santa Cruz., Howard University, California College of the Arts, Fashion Institute of Los Angeles, University of New Mexico, and various state colleges. There are some students for whom large, comprehensive high schools are intimidating; Far West provides a small environment in which students flourish.

In Brief

This spring three North Oakland schools received the prestigious California Distinguished Award: **Chabot Elementary, Peralta Elementary, and Thornhill Elementary. Montclair Elementary** also received this award. Peralta also received recognition as a Distinguished Title 1 School, along with **Lincoln Elementary**.

Oakland Technical High School this summer is sending a delegation of students to the **International Fringe Festival** in Edinburgh, Scotland. Tech’s drama department, under the direction of Jessa Brie Berkner, was invited last year to be one of only 50 schools in the U.S. that participates in this annual event. Ms. Berkner, her students, and the community spent a lot of time this past year preparing and raising the funds to travel to Scotland. For many of the participants, this will be their first time outside California, let alone the U.S.

I encourage you to discover for yourself the many wonderful things happening in our neighborhood schools. Please contact me for more information, or contact the Principal directly.

School Board Adopts Strategic Vision for Community Schools

Schools Serve the Whole Child

In June, the School Board adopted a strategic vision for becoming a “Full Service Community District.” By this, we envision that every neighborhood school in Oakland will be a full service community school, where the school has broadened its mission and vision to meet the needs of all its students. In addition to high quality education, the school will provide health, mental health, and other services. We will emphasize educating and caring for the whole child.

Superintendent Smith is eloquent in discussing the opportunities that abound in Oakland. He also is clear that we must, as a community, do something different to create a healthy climate for learning, personal safety, vibrant neighborhoods, positive employment, civic participation, sustainable business development, and overall quality of life.

Quality Educational Opportunities in Every Part of Town

We all realize that resources are scarce and shrinking – OUSD’s budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year is significantly smaller than last year due to the State budget crisis. At the same time, the Board agrees with the Superintendent that unless we change the way we have conducted ourselves, we cannot expect to see different outcomes. With this understanding, we will launch a series of task forces that, over the next year, will develop the game plan for becoming a Full Service Community District. One of our goals is to ensure quality educational opportunities in every part of Oakland. We therefore will be working in three geographic regions, which match the regions used by the Oakland Police Department. North Oakland is in Region 1.

Town Hall Meeting with Director London and Superintendent Smith

If you would like more information, I encourage you to review the Strategic Vision documents, which can be found online at [OUSD Strategic Vision 2010](#). You can also learn more in person when I host a **Town Hall Meeting with Superintendent Smith, Tuesday, September 28, 2010, 7 – 8:30 P.M.** at Piedmont Avenue Elementary School, 4314 Piedmont Avenue.

Parcel Tax On November Ballot Would Provide Funds for Salaries at School Sites

On July 29, the School Board voted to place on the November 2, 2010 ballot a parcel tax that will give voters the option of providing additional local funding for Oakland public schools. Funds from the **Oakland Student Achievement, Support and Safety Measure** will be used exclusively to support teacher effectiveness and to provide greater compensation for classroom instructors and school-site support staff. Oakland voters have a long history of supporting public schools. The Board recognizes that the economic crisis is affecting everyone, but we also know that ongoing community support will help us achieve our ambitious goals.

Funds Are Needed to Prepare Students and Attract and Retain Top-Quality Teachers

My colleagues and I noted that the parcel tax is required in order to:

- Continue recent gains in academic achievement;
- Prepare students for success in college and career;
- Attract and retain greater numbers of top-quality teachers;
- Enhance overall teacher performance;
- Ensure every school has adequate numbers of qualified support staff;
- Develop stronger school climates where higher levels of learning can take place.
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Local Revenue Can Help Fill the Gap Created by the State Budget Crisis

For the last three years, reductions in state funding have devastated K-12 education across California and forced Oakland Unified to make the largest budget cuts in its history. For the fiscal year that started July 1, in order to submit a balanced budget we cut \$122 million from our

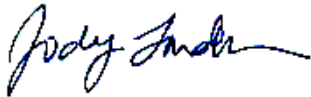
budget, and laid off more than 600 people, including some teachers. In filling the void left by the State, local revenue can play a critical role in continuing and accelerating the progress that has made OUSD California's most improved, large urban district over the past five years.

The parcel tax includes fiscal accountability provisions such as a mandatory review by the Citizens' Oversight Committee, public expenditure reports and guaranteed annual independent audits. The decision to place the measure on the ballot was prompted, in part, by the results of an independent community survey conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates. The study concluded that Oakland voters remain very supportive of Oakland's schools and prepared to back a local funding measure for 10 years at the necessary two-thirds requirement level. Survey participants identified priorities such as student achievement, college and career readiness and retaining teachers.

If you would like to get involved with the parcel tax campaign, please contact me.

Please feel free to share this newsletter!

It is my honor to serve Oakland's First District.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jody London". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jody London
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