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## Lafayette School District Implements Changes

By Jean Follmer

Lafayette School District Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill said the District is implementing a number of positive initiatives amidst the uncertainty of the State of California's financial crisis. "That is the hardest part, the uncertainty that we're dealing with. It's an unsettling time but there are still some wonderful things happening in our District," said Dr. Brill.

Initiatives in all areas of the District are moving forward. Curriculum developments include Thinking Strategies, Math Adoption, Writing and Physical Education. Training in Thinking Strategies has continued to be provided to staff and offered to parents this year by consultant Dina Macdonald. "It's been pretty impressive in terms of the teachers' level of commitment," said Rachel Zinn, Director of Curriculum. The District is holding "demonstration days" at each school "where teachers engage in intensive professional development and observe their colleagues implementing lessons using the thinking strategies in a live classroom setting," said Zinn. The Thinking Strategies program enables teachers to teach the students how to think in even deeper ways. It encourages questions like, "What can good readers do to navigate difficult text?" said Zinn. The last Thinking Strategies parent education event was held at Stanley on October 14 and the next will be held on January 21, 2009, at 6:00 pm at Stanley Middle School. All parents are invited to attend.

The district updates its curriculum on a rotating basis. This year, the math program is being evaluated and updated. Zinn said decisions about new math texts will be made in April, 2009. The New York Writing Project is also being introduced district-wide. In a recent memo, Zinn indicated the Project coincides naturally with Thinking Strategies.

Physical Education is also seeing changes. All Lafayette elementary schools are currently piloting the CATCH Program (Coordinated Approach to Child Health). "CATCH builds an alliance of children, parents, teachers, and school staff to teach skills and behaviors associated with maintaining healthy lifestyles. CATCH coordinates four component areas, including classroom curricula, food service modifications, physical education changes, and family enforcement, targeting both children's behaviors and the school's environment." CATCH has been adopted in thousands of schools throughout the country and information can be found at [www.catchinfo.org](http://www.catchinfo.org).

Dr. Brill also sites the switch to solar energy as a bright spot within the District. The District was able to install solar panels in all school except Happy Valley Elementary. Happy Valley has a number of large trees on the property so solar wasn't an option for that school. Brill said the District will realize approximately a 20% savings on energy costs. He said another great benefit is that the students will have an opportunity to learn about solar energy in a hands-on manner.

Brill indicated the District is awaiting the Governor's announcement in January to determine the financial impact to the District as a result of the budget shortfall. "We are carefully monitoring the economic conditions of the state and the impact on the Lafayette School District budget," said Brill in a written memo. Brill said the District is "cautiously optimistic that we will be able to weather mid-year budget cuts; we expect to find out the full scope of these budget reductions sometime in January."

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