

La Canada Teachers Association

HIGHLIGHTS

**Volume 12, Issue 3
January/February 2006**

**Letters and Articles are welcomed!
Upcoming HIGHLIGHTS deadlines:
March 13, April 3, May 8, and June 12**

LCTA website: lcteachers.net

President's Message

Mandy Redfern

Welcome to second semester! I hope this time of year offers a breath of fresh air before we start preparing for standardized tests and the end of the year. As you know, negotiations are right around the corner. Just like your LCTA leadership team seeks your input, our School Board is searching for input from the community regarding several issues. One issue in particular is the evaluation process of staff members. On Tuesday, February 28th beginning at 5:00 p.m., the School Board will be hosting a workshop on this topic of evaluation. If you are available, please try to stop in and participate. Your presence is not only welcomed but encouraged.

I want to take a moment and thank Richard Weld for all of his hard work and dedication to LCTA and the development of our Political Action Committee. He has spent countless hours working on setting up the program and helping LCTA have a voice in our local politics. This committee is new for La Canada Teachers and he has worked hard to establish a committee that can truly make an impact for our teachers and students in the coming years. Thank you Richard for all of your efforts!

As I mentioned before, negotiations are coming and Mary Jane has been working with the district and CTA to set up a training schedule so that the negotiating teams can all be trained together on Interest Based Bargaining. This training should prove to be beneficial for years to come as we enter negotiations with a completely different tone. Thank you Mary Jane for all of your hard work on setting up this training. I hope that this will bring about positive change in our district.

I also want to encourage everyone to begin thinking about our own elections for our La Canada Teachers Association. The elections for new officers will be held in a matter of two months. If you think you might be interested in joining Rep. Council or PR&R for the 2006-2007 school year, please let me know. There are opportunities in the summer to attend workshops sponsored by the California Teachers Association too help you learn how to perform the responsibilities of each of these jobs. Take a risk, support your colleagues and run for a position on LCTA. Let me know if you are interested or if you would like to talk to someone about the various jobs.

Political Action Report

Richard Weld, Chair

LA CANADA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION FORMS COMMITTEE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

As I reported to you in a previous Highlights issue, LCTA last summer and fall took steps to set up a political action committee to identify candidates that we could support in the school board election. Since the beginning of the school year, Rep Council has had discussions about creating a formal political action committee with funding to continue on an ongoing basis. At the February meeting, Rep Council voted to approve the by-laws of a legally chartered political action committee called the La Canada Teachers Association Committee for Quality Education. It will be funded with \$5.00 per year of your current dues. No dues increase is necessary because of recent increases in our local membership. The officers and members of the committee must be members of LCTA and are appointed by the LCTA president with consent of Rep Council. Rep Council must also approve the committee budget.

Outreach and mobilization of the La Canada community will be a major goal of the Committee for Quality Education. As already mentioned, the committee will be searching for qualified candidates for the next school board election and provide funding and volunteer support. Even in a non-election year the committee will inform our members and the community about important issues that face LCUSD. This could mean actively supporting a parcel tax, or informing the community when the leadership of the district is not making decisions that we think are in the best interest of students and teachers.

All of this sounds great, but it will not happen without your support. The funding is important, but will have little impact unless you are willing to work on the committee or volunteer to go out into the community to actively support our candidates and issues when the time comes. If you would like to serve on the LCTA Committee for Quality Education, please let Mandy or me know. Together we can make our remarkable La Canada schools even better.

State Council Report

Richard Weld

The late January CTA State Council meeting was a busy one. We were updated on the governor's proposed budget, which includes a 5.18% COLA increase and another 0.59% increase to partially repay the revenue owed to schools under proposition 98. This is encouraging, but schools are still owed billions of dollars that have not been funded due to the governor's broken promise from last year.

Council also had an extensive discussion of the Rob Reiner backed preschool initiative that will be on the June primary ballot. The initiative will provide every child in the state with the opportunity of free three-hour-per-day preschool. Funds will be available to both public and private non-parochial schools. The money will come from a 1.7% income tax on individuals with incomes over \$400,000 and couples with incomes over \$800,000 per year. It will be phased in over several years and by 2016, all preschool teachers in schools provided this funding must be fully credentialed just as you and I are. CTA is not happy about all of the details, especially the current practice in California of piece-meal tax increases for specific issues with no comprehensive plan for increasing resources to K-14 education. However, this is a chance to put every student in California on more equal footing when they begin kindergarten. You will be hearing more about this from CTA in the months to come.

On the political front, council voted to approve the CTA interview committee recommendations for candidates for statewide office in November. All candidates running for statewide office in November were given the opportunity to fill in a questionnaire, and to be interviewed by a CTA committee that included at least one Republican. The recommended candidates are for Governor, Phil Angelides; Lieutenant Governor, John

Garamendi; Attorney General, Rocky Delgadillo; Treasurer, Bill Lockyear; and Insurance Commissioner, Cruz Bustamante. There was no recommendation for secretary of state in order to give more time to interview the Republican candidate who entered the race late. CTA is very sensitive to the fact that almost all recommended candidates for statewide and local assembly and state senate offices are Democrats. Remember that when CTA recommends a candidate it is only based on his/her support of public education and no other issue. If you are a Republican, urge your party and party's elected officials to support public education. Even six year's ago, when I first joined state council, CTA supported several Republicans for elected office. I don't think CTA has changed, but the political climate has changed so that there are few moderates of either party left in Sacramento. Support for public education should be a bipartisan issue.

On a final note, I have decided to not run for a third term on State Council. It has been a lot of fun and incredibly interesting to serve you in this office. Mandy, your president, has decided to run, and I urge you to vote for her when the election occurs this spring. LCTA is part of a multiple state council district that includes Las Virgenes, which is much larger than we are. So be sure to vote!

Negotiations

Mary Jane Hufstедler

It is time to begin negotiating again! It seems like just yesterday we were marching down the boulevard with signs. This time we are going to use Interest Based Bargaining, which is a problem-solving process that might keep us from experiencing the protracted negotiations we experienced last time. Not having the funds to give teachers a salary increase for three out of the last four years is definitely a problem that needs to be solved. You should have received and returned a negotiations survey that was distributed on Wednesday February 8th and returned on the 10th. If you did not return it, please do so now.

Highlights of January 9 Rep Council minutes:

- CTA is holding a High School Reform Briefings on March 10 at the Hollywood Renaissance Hotel. Topics will include state policymaker's perspective on High School Reform (CTA, ACSA, CDE, CSBA, State Legislature); High School Reform and its impact on teachers and students; The Union's role in High School Reform; Fact or Fiction: Small Learning Communities; and High Stakes Testing and High School Reform. For further information or questions about the HSR briefings, contact Craig Nelson at (650) 552-5496. To register online go to www.cta.org, click on "CTA Conferences" and then click on "Good Teaching Conference" and you will be directed to the link for the registration form. Deadline is February 21, 2006. The fee for the all-day session is \$50.
- Richard reported that we have 4 new members and are at 96% membership.
- New members were voted in to PR&R. See the list of representatives and PR&R members at the end of the Highlights.
- There are still concerns about Special Education (brought up again by Paradise Canyon) at the elementary sites being over the maximum. Rep Council voted to NOT allow the district to offer 117% to elementary teachers to teach 32 instead of 28 students. It was felt that this was not fair to either students or teachers involved.
- Teachers are still concerned about being rehired year after year as "temporary", thereby not earning tenure. Mandy reported that this problem is being discussed at the administrative level.
- The administrators are also discussing job sharing. There are a number of teachers who have requested a job-share assignment for next year. Jim Stratton is the one who makes that decision.
- Class size is a continuing problem with some elementary classrooms going over the maximum of 33. See the editorial for more information.
- Palm Crest teachers had questions about the number of units allowed per teacher per year on the pay scale. The past practice was not more than 3 undergraduate or 4 graduate credits per school year, but that a teacher could take as many units as s/he wanted during the summer. This needs to be clarified in the contract.
- RSP classes continue to be a concern since the half-time teacher is split between campuses and cannot be available for all needed times.

- Kindergarten is also a concern, including the fact that the assistant resigned and no one has been hired to replace her.
- 7-8 continues to have concerns about hiring practices for summer school, how to check the accuracy of the last pay check, and that they were unaware that any teachers in the district were being paid 117%. The district made the decision to offer kindergarten teachers a choice: they could either drop to 66% and teach half day, be paid 117% and teach a full day with no preparation time, or leave the kindergarten classroom. Some of the teachers chose to take the 117%. They have to come early or stay late to have their preparation time, just as teachers at the high school did who used to teach six periods.
- Also teachers felt “pressured” when asked to be a leader for WASC because when they asked if there would be compensation they were told no, but that other teachers had agreed to take on the role without compensation. Should WASC be included in extra pay/extra duty?
- 9-12 concerns included asking teachers to keep students with non-emergency health problems in the classroom when the nurse is absent. Couldn't a substitute nurse be hired? Wouldn't that be cheaper than having teachers get sick because they are exposed to ill students?
- Should there be an annual stipend for people with a doctorate? Many districts do give one.

Highlights of February 6 Rep Council minutes:

- Richard Weld presented the PAC by-laws for a second reading, and Rep Council approved them and approved the funding of PAC from our dues. A letter will be distributed to all members so that anyone who does not want \$5 of his or dues to go to PAC can sign a waiver. It will not increase or reduce the amount of dues paid, but merely control where those monies go.
- Richard also reported on State Council and the governor's budget. See his report.
- Richard announced that there are only two teachers who are fee-payers instead of members, and both of them intend to join but just haven't completed the paperwork yet.
- The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) “Highly Qualified” teacher legislation goes into effect this summer. If any teacher is not highly qualified, the school MUST mail a letter home to all of the students of that teacher every 20 days, saying that the teacher is not highly qualified, and offering parents the chance to transfer their children out of that teacher's class.

- Craig Franzen shared the forms that Glendale School District uses to evaluate teachers. He found them to be more thought provoking and meaningful than the ones we currently use. These forms will be put in the evaluation file for negotiations.
- Materials are available for the annual reading day, Read Across America. To get materials, ideas for activities, clip art and certificates go to www.nea.org/readacross/catalog.html or www.cta.org.
- There will be an STRS informational meeting at District Office on March 13 from 3:30 to 5:00. At this meeting individual appointments will be made for those members who would like one.
- A negotiations survey will be put in your boxes soon. It asks you to prioritize money items to give direction to the negotiating team. Be aware that a 1% raise costs approximately \$150,000, and that to lower class sizes by 1 K-12 would cost ½ million dollars. There is currently no information available about health costs for next year.
- School concerns include tenure issues for “indefinitely temporary” teachers as well as problems with staffing for special education. Mandy is having on-going discussions with district personnel about both of these issues.
- Grades on line continue to be a concern at 7-8. The minimum requirements are that starting next school year, quarter and semester grades be entered on Pinnacle.
- Technology (or lack thereof) continues to be a concern at the 9-12 level. To fix the problems we’ve been having cost over \$400,000 (some from general fund monies). That total represents a 3% raise!
- Pinnacle will not be available on-line to 7-12 parents and students for the first five weeks of the semester so that grade fluctuation at the beginning of the semester will not overly alarm them.

Class Size

Mary Walsten

As a long-standing proponent of smaller being better when it comes to class size, I was thrilled to be asked by members of Rep Council to write on this topic. I know I’m preaching to the choir, but the difference is so obvious to me this year in my three English 2 classes. In smaller classes the students and I are more relaxed because things go more quickly, it’s easier to hear everyone, and everyone can participate on a daily basis. Everyone’s

questions can be answered regularly within the class period. In my larger classes, not only does the noise level rise, but the time constraints grow also. I don't have time to answer everyone's questions, let alone get around to look at everyone's work. I often say to someone requesting help, "See me after class"—and sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't. And of course when it comes to oral reports the difference is night and day. In a class of 36, a simple 3-5 minute report for each student can take DAYS—and it's difficult to maintain interest (students as well as teachers) in the reports for that sustained an amount of time. Then of course, my favorite, grading. For each student in class, a rough estimate of the time it takes me to grade and record (both on my clipboard and in the computer) their class work, homework, quiz scores, grammar tests, vocabulary tests, in-class writings and outside-of-class writings per week is, let's say, a half hour. That's a pretty conservative estimate, I think! But that means that if you add one student to each of my classes, you have added two and one half hours to my week. That's a lot of time! Another way of looking at this is if a teacher has 150 students and takes one minute a day to record papers for each student (class work turned in, exercises done—a quick scan of the work, and then recording the score) that would take two and one-half hours—and that's every day. And what about lesson planning? Quiz writing? Test creation? Conferring with students on writing? Interviewing students and writing college letters of recommendation? Attending IEP's and parent conferences? Attending level meetings, department meetings and faculty meetings? Attending committee meetings I've agreed to be a member of? How many hours are there in a day?

Our current district policy on class size is a maximum of 20 K-3, 33 4-6 and 36 7-12 in academic classes. Physical education classes at 7-12 have up to 55! The P. E. facilities can't even handle that many students at one time! If the 21st student is placed in a K-3 grade classroom, the district is out of compliance and loses the state funding. So, that's taken care of. However, at the 4-12 levels, things are different. First of all, at least 7-12, a teacher can agree to take the "extra" kid or kids. I personally think that this is a poor choice on the part of the teacher. I know that it's difficult to say no to a student, but by taking that "extra" person into his or her classroom, the teacher is "cheating" not only himself or herself, but also the other students in the room. There just isn't enough of time or the teacher to "go around"!

So, what happens if a 4-12 classroom goes over the "maximum"? Well, I learned this first hand a couple of years ago. The answer is that a committee is formed to discuss and solve the problem. The committee is made up of

equal parts administrators and teachers. When I was on such a committee, the teachers wanted to honor the maximum (and minimums—but that’s another topic!) in the contract, and the administrators did not. Since we could not reach an agreement, Sue Leabo would not act. So, nothing changed. Obviously this is a weak area in our contract, but the district in past bargaining meetings was not willing to change this section and give more weight to those maximums for obvious reasons.

What I would dream of seeing happen: Maximum class size K-6 at 20-1 and 25-1 at the 7-12 level. I would also like to see classes with a heavy emphasis on writing (AP Social Science and English classes) be taught by teachers who have only four classes a day.

Now, back to reality.

But we could reinstate the (partially) state-funded 20-1 at the ninth grade level in English and Algebra 1. We could try to get the class maximums down at the 4-12 levels. Maybe we could have the goal of going down one student at a time until 30-1 is reached, or even lower. I truly believe that not only would students feel more relaxed and a part of school—rather than a “number”, but that stress levels would be reduced and better education would occur. I would rather have smaller classes than more technology, more support and auxiliary administration and personnel, and more (blasphemy!) money in my paycheck. What good is money if I’m too busy grading papers to enjoy it?

Editor’s note: Since I first wrote this editorial in January, the board has had discussions about class size and Jim Stratton attended the last 7-12 staff meeting to discuss some of the ideas that the board had for class size reduction. Obviously, it all comes down to money—and that’s in limited supply, even with monies coming in next year at an increase of approximately 5.77%. I am heartened to hear that the board is concerned and discussing some plans to reduce class size. I am glad to hear that parents are concerned. Monies get spent in a lot of areas—technology, building repair and renovation, health benefits and salary are some of the “big ticket” items. Hopefully as negotiations begin again the team of negotiators for the teachers and the district can come to a “win-win” solution to how to equitably distribute those funds for the good of the staff as well as the students.

LCTA Representative Council Members 2005-2006

Executive Board:

President:	Mandy Redfern
Executive Vice President:	Mary Jane Hufstedler
Public Relations Vice President:	Mary Walsten
Treasurer:	Dana Leu
Secretary:	Mary Lou Langedyke
State Council representative:	Richard Weld

Representatives:

LCHS: 9-12

Rick Jordan
Edna Johnson
Bob Huson
Mark Ewoldson
Nic Larez (alternate)
Nancy Padilla (alternate)

LCHS 7-8

Leslie Baldwin
Simon Constanides
Suzanne Healy (alternate)

La Canada Elementary:

Stephanie van Belle
Pat Harris
Jan Rappleye (alternate)

Palm Crest Elementary:

Maggie Landau
Barbara Felsing
Sue Carr (alternate)

Paradise Canyon Elementary:

Jenny Hendler
Mike Upton
Marion Darling (alternate)

Public Relations and Responsibilities (PR&R)

LCHS: 9-12

Bob Huson
Mary Jane Hufstedler
Jim Harvey
Need one more representative

LCHS 7-8

Barbara Leach
Paul Kim

La Canada Elementary:

Judy Barrie
Pam Daniger

Palm Crest Elementary:

Maggie Landau
Liz Strand

Paradise Canyon Elementary:

Katie Budde
Marion Darling

**Future Rep Council Meeting Dates
2005-6**

March 6, 2006 March 27, 2006
May 1, 2006 June 5, 2006 June 16, 2006

All LCTA members are welcome!
Meetings are held at 3:30 in the library at La Canada Elementary.
GREAT refreshments will be served!

March 6th snacks by Jan and Pat
March 27th snacks by Mary Lou and Stephanie
May 1st snacks by Rick and ?
June 5th snacks by Bob and Edna