

# PUSD NEWS

Placerville Union  
School District

April 2015

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## Upcoming Events

- ◆ April 16th Incoming 6th Grade Parent Night
- ◆ April 25th Markham Mud Run
- ◆ May 7th Open House Markham
- ◆ May 8th Open House Schnell
- ◆ May 14th Open House Sierra
- ◆ May 29th Markham Graduation
- ◆ May 29th Last Day of School

## Technology Enhancements at Placerville Union SD



*Placerville Union School District's LCAP, Budget and Vision come together to build a strong educational foundation for our students .*

Like many school districts throughout California, PUSD is exploring enhancements to the education we provide our students through expanded use of technology. Making greater use of digital devices better prepares students for the developing educational environment beyond 8th Grade and future employment opportunities; which increasingly requires proficiency in technology.

The expense of implementing and maintaining technology can be difficult to accommodate within our limited operational budget. The District has – and will continue to – apply for all available grant funding, though it is unpredictable and cannot be relied upon, to consistently

meet our technology needs.

However, fiscally responsible and conservative options do exist to request a community investment for funding and sustaining a PUSD technology program. One of these options is a Prop. 39 bond measure, which would be repaid by local property owners for a period that matches the useful life of the technology program. In addition, the District would be required to appoint an Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee to monitor and report on how the bond funds are used, as well as conduct annual audits of all bond expenditures.

The first possible date for this measure to be on the ballot is November 3, 2015. The Board is in the process of seeking input about our overall technology goals and planning the most effective way to meet them now and for many years into the future.

As such, the District will be making presentations to a number of civic organizations over the next couple of months, so please join us to learn more and share your thoughts – or just give Superintendent Bonniksen a call at 622-7216 to ask any questions you may have.

## New State Test Being Implemented at PUSD

PUSD, along with all school districts in California, has a new academic testing system called "CAASPP (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress)". This month, our 3rd–8th grade students will be taking the mathematics and English/Language Arts CAASPP test.

This new test, also referred to as the Smarter Balanced Assessment,

will give us information on how our students are making progress towards the California Content Standards. The CAASPP tests are computer based and administered online using a stand-alone computer, chrome book or laptop. The tests are also computer adapted which means the difficulty of the test will be adjusted dependent on how the student responds to the test questions. Since all of the testing is

completed online, it is imperative that we continue to upgrade and expand our technology throughout the school district.

The websites listed provide more information about our new testing system:

[www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org); or  
[www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/index.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/index.asp).

## FAME is Dragon-tastic

Often when people think about what is taught in school they think reading, writing and math. That is obviously the big focus at schools across the country. However, for several years at Sierra School we have also maintained a focus on art and music. The program is called FAME and stands for Fine Arts Mini Experience. This interactive and content rich program teaches students the fundamen-

tals of art and music. Each lesson is history-based, and emphasizes an artistic element of a painting and a musical composition. Students participate in hands-on experiences that include various artistic media and performance activities. FAME is a great opportunity for academic enrichment while also teaching artistic and creative perception. The program is funded through the Sierra Parent

Club, lovingly known as TEAM Sierra. Families raise money for a walk-a-thon, which we call 'Walk of FAME.' This fun filled, annual event brings the whole school together and the money raised keeps this great program on campus year after year. Just ask our students they will tell you, "FAME is DRAGON-TASTIC!"



Sierra Kindergarteners enjoying their FAME class.

"foster a love of reading that will last throughout their lives."

## Lions Club Encourages Reading at both Sierra and Schnell

Reading is fundamental in the educational process of all students. It is also a life-long skill that children and adults can enjoy throughout their entire lives. Knowing the importance of reading the Lions Club of Placerville sponsored a reading contest during the month of February

at both Sierra and Schnell Schools. For every Accelerated Reader test that a student passed they got a ticket to win a Kindle Reader. Students were excited all month about the opportunity to win. At an assembly in March, Derrell Roberts from the Lions Club pulled names

of a winner for each grade level. Derrell stated, "Through the Kindle Literacy Project our hope is to encourage students to improve their reading and foster a love of reading that will last throughout their lives.."

## Local Service Clubs Support Band Program

At the start of the spring semester, PUSD Music Director Larry Hudson was a guest at both the Kiwanis and Rotary Club meetings. Larry, along with 7th and 8th grade band students, spoke about the music program at Edwin Markham Middle School. The students were able to tell the members how important music is to them and all the activities that they do through the band program. Mr. Hudson spoke about the importance of music education, as well as some of the needs, specifically the replacement of aging instruments. With a school that has been around for over 50 years, there are quite a few instruments that have outlived their usefulness or are in need of repair. In the end, the members of both clubs were so moved by both the impact the program on our students and the needs that were expressed, that they donated almost \$8000 to the program. Our appreciation and gratitude for these community service clubs is summed up by Mr. Hudson: "The time I spent with these organizations confirmed to me their value to our schools and community. Their dedication to children is truly admirable; and the generosity they showered on our band program literally brought me to tears".



Mr. Hudson getting the Markham Band ready for their concert.



*Markham students participating in the Chromebook pilot program.*

## Panthers Pursue Innovation

The teachers at Edwin Markham Middle School recognize that in order to close the achievement gap, we need to close the technology gap. Seeking to put more computer devices in the hands of their students, Amanda Alessandro, 6th grade math, and Christine Gluvers, 6th grade English, applied for and were awarded one of 10 Innovation Grants, sponsored by the El Dorado County Office of Education. Ms. Alessandro and Ms. Gluvers now share a mobile lab of 36 Chromebooks which are used by our 6th grade students on a daily basis. All Markham students have Google Drive accounts and are becoming experts at the various applications available through Google. Our 6th grade students collaborate with each other on presentations, research topics for writing, and submit assignments to their teachers using the Chromebooks. While having students work on individual devices sounds like it would be very isolating, it is anything but! Students are quick to assist each other with the different tools they are using and several have shown themselves to be our resident student experts! The computers provide that “something special” that engages even the most reluctant of students and we have seen a rise in student achievement. We are seeing early evidence that by closing the technology gap, our students are becoming true 21st Century learners!

## Writing Continues to Improve at Markham

At Edwin Markham Middle School, students in need of extra support in writing get that extra help thanks to a new tool being used in English classes, “Write to Learn”. This web-based program gives students opportunities to write frequently and receive instant feedback. After submitting their work, students immediately receive feedback

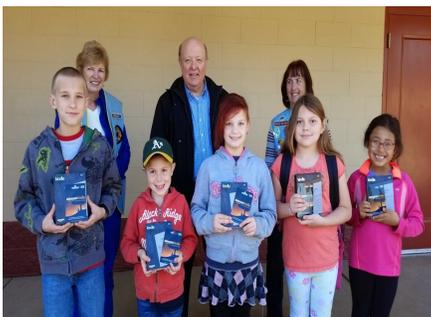
covering six different areas of writing, including grammar, complexity and relevance. Once a student receives their feedback, they can work on those specific areas to improve their writing.

When students are able to see their improvement displayed immediately, it provides a huge boost to their confidence. Stu-

dents work hard to improve their scores, asking their teacher for help and spending dedicated time on their writing. Students report liking the immediate feedback, stating it makes it easier to improve. Being able to work closely with their teacher, “Write to Learn” is an effective tool in supporting students in the important skill of writing.

“When students are able to see their improvement displayed immediately, it provides a huge boost to their confidence. “

## Accelerated Reader Going Strong at Schnell School



*Accelerated Reader Lions Club winners at Schnell School.*

Students at Schnell School are making great progress in the area of reading by utilizing the Accelerated Reader (AR) Program. Using the AR Program students are motivated to read more through a variety of goals and rewards. Students are accessing books at the school library, El Dorado County Library, as well as their bookshelves at home. Students quickly discover that most books are AR books.

What is AR? The Accelerated Reader Program is a program that tests reading comprehension. Students select books at their reading level, read those books independently, and then take an independent comprehension test on a school computer. Points are based on the length and reading level of each book.. Students get a percentage of these points based on how many of the test questions they get right. The program tracks their progress over the course of the school year.

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*Eric Bonnicksen, Superintendent*

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## Employee Spotlight



*LaRee Uchida — Director of Transportations and Maintenance*

The employee spotlight this month is LaRee Uchida. LaRee is the Director of Transportation and Maintenance for the School District.

LaRee has been employed with the Placerville Union School District for the past 17 years. LaRee began as a bus driver/trainer and was promoted to the Director position in 2002.

As the Director, LaRee oversees all aspects of transportation such as organizing bus routes, schedules, making sure that the busses are maintained efficiently and in good working order and making sure that all of our students get to school and home safely.

LaRee is a sought after trainer for bus drivers throughout El Dorado County. She regularly trains new hires for other districts. We are very lucky to have an expert of her caliber working for our District.

Even with all the responsibilities of overseeing all the transportation along with all the maintenance projects throughout the district you will regularly find LaRee driving one of the bus routes since it is very difficult to find substitute drivers.

You would think that driving students through out the school year would be enough, but not for LaRee! She also enjoys driving bus for rafting companies throughout the summer.