

Governing Board Meeting January 19, 2010

Public Forum

In response to a ten-year trend of declining enrollment in the Lemon Grove School District, as well as the extended fiscal crisis in the state of California, the district is considering the closure of one of our schools. A review of some possible scenarios, including the option of temporarily closing Lemon Grove Middle School during Proposition W modernization, was presented.

Mr. Anastos thanked everyone for attending this meeting. He stated that in addition to the District's declining enrollment, all East County districts are experiencing the same declining enrollment. In 10 years, the District has lost 750 students. In addition, the District also has lost funding to operate the schools. Costs continue to increase. At best, the District will hold the current numbers for the next ten years. The decision to close a school has been postponed for a number of years. One way to correct the problem would be to downsize to seven or six schools. Both middle schools are under 650 students. This is a comfortable size, but the District can no longer afford to keep these small sizes. In addition to declining enrollment, revenue has been reduced from the state due to the state budget crisis. Helix Charter High School has just announced it will shorten their school year by two days.

The District has already cut \$4 million over the past two years and must cut \$4 million more for next year. Everyone in the District will be impacted. Half a million dollars a year will be saved if a middle school is closed: \$400,000 if an elementary school is closed. There are some districts that will go into receivership and lose control of their decisions. We can control the decisions we make.

The Proposition W bond money must be used for very specific projects. Ten million dollars of that money will be used on Lemon Grove Middle School projects, such as the library and the STEM school. It cannot be used for salaries.

Mr. Anastos shared information on facilities reduction scenarios as prepared by DecisionInsite. This company helped the District look at demographics and at redistricting within the District. Three scenarios were presented. For illustration, they used Monterey Heights and San Altos as the two sample elementary school scenarios. For each example, they provided information on keeping the current K-5 configuration and with a K-6 configuration. Space for out of District students would continue to be provided. The number of spaces at remaining schools and information on boundary changes were presented. Elementary students would need to be reassigned to multiple schools. The District has space for 5000 students; we currently have 3900 students. The third scenario provided information on closing Lemon Grove Middle School, housing all seventh and eighth grade students at Palm Middle School during the Proposition W construction, and operating all elementary schools as K-6. The Proposition W timeline at LGMS is about two years. In addition to the library, about \$3 million in changes will be made to the Lemon Grove Middle School campus. There would be 774 seventh and eighth grade students at Palm Middle School. This would impact 294 seventh and eighth grade Lemon Grove Middle School students who would be relocated to Palm Middle School for two years. AP Spanish and the band program would be relocated to Palm Middle School. The location and distance could be a problem for some students and families. Mr. Anastos shared comparisons in the size of neighboring middle schools whose sizes are between 800 and 1100 students.

The District needs to come up with a way to deal with the budget crisis and continue to run an efficient organization. Over the past three years of addressing a budget crisis, the idea of school closure has been mentioned but has not been necessary. Mr. Anastos introduced the Board members who will be making these very difficult decisions.

The following people addressed the Board with their comments and concerns:

- Donna Walz stated that the state that her family came from changed the school week to four days, which increased attendance and helped with the budget.
- Theresa Garcia asked if busing will be provided. *Mr. Anastos stated that a shuttle currently runs from Palm Middle to LGMS for AP Spanish students. Transportation options are being discussed.* Ms. Garcia stated that her children have had a very good experience at LGMS, and she chose to keep her children at the school even with its PI status. She asked if Palm is PI. *Mr. Anastos stated that it is not.* Ms. Garcia asked about class size and GATE and other elective programs at Palm. *Mr. Anastos stated that there*

is no intention to increase class size at the middle school. Without sixth grade at the middle school, classrooms would be available. A separate building would be built to house the PE equipment and make that classroom available. Bathrooms would be added to accommodate the extra students. There are additional relocatables available to the school. Ms. Garcia asked if students would return to LGMS with two middle schools after the two-year modernization process. Mr. Anastos stated that LGMS will reopen as soon as possible. Bonds are sold in a series. The next sale is set for 2011 to help complete the library. The actual work could be completed in one year, but the project is drawn out because the Division of State Architect must monitor the project. Bond money will support the transformation of LGMS into a STEM school. Decisions about the middle schools will be determined by the status of the state budget. Ms. Garcia asked where the other \$3.5 million would come from if \$500,000 will be reduced by closing a middle school. Mr. Anastos stated that the District needs to downsize the whole organization. Last year, the District downsized by 20 teachers; 15 teachers took advantage of an early retirement incentive. Layoffs will happen for individuals in all employee groups this year. The K-3 student to teacher ratio was 20:1 last year and is 24:1 this year. That increase saved the District from additional cuts.

- Jeff Paul expressed satisfaction with the education his children receive at San Altos School. He stated that he does not have solutions to the District's problems. He asked about the criteria for the closing of San Altos School. Mr. Anastos stated that San Altos School was used for the scenario because it is the smallest school and would involve the fewest students. Monterey Heights School was used because it is physically complicated with terraces and ramps that need to be improved. The choice of any school will be difficult. Mr. Paul asked if the cost of running a small school should be taken into consideration. Mr. Anastos responded that the savings will be the cost of a principal and staff. Mr. Paul stated that his family has had a wonderful experience at San Altos and that his two children have received a great education.
- LGTA President Andee Aceves asked if the District has considered consolidating with La Mesa-Spring Valley School District or another small district to combine services. She noted that the charter proposal presented to the Board at its last meeting will not be the last. There is no growth in enrollment. She sees a short-term gain for two years. Larger class sizes now and a shorter year in the future would not be good for students.
- Fran Garcia asked how far elementary students would need to go to get to another school. Would transportation be provided? There are 36 students in her son's class. He is not challenged with that many students in the class. Ms. Garcia expressed satisfaction with the school and its teachers. If elementary schools are combined, then there will be larger classes. She asked what parents can do to cut the costs and if volunteering would be possible.
- CSEA labor representative Chris Swanson asked if the District has looked into merging with another district. She asked about the impact of school closure on employees. Mr. Anastos stated that this week, he will be meeting with other East County superintendents at a conference to discuss sharing resources. Current legislation does not allow for reducing staff when merging districts. Any decision made to personnel is in accordance with contracts. If a school closes, seniority and contracts would be put into play. Mr. Heath has been working with CSEA and LGTA representatives.
- Ryan Baxter stated that he thinks that employees who are not performing need to be cut. He asked if a study has been done about why enrollment is declining. If schools are performing, parents will not leave the schools. Mr. Shaw responded that in his neighborhood, there are many grandparents who have not moved out of the area after their children have grown. They aren't leaving, and the neighborhood is aging out. Mr. Anastos stated that there are fewer school-aged children in California. Few districts are growing. Fifty percent of districts in the state are in a declining growth mode. There are families that are choosing other schools. Mr. Baxter asked if closing a school would further reduce the budget. Eventually, won't the District be back at this same situation with continued declining enrollment? Mr. Anastos stated that during the Learning Environment Committee meeting, the idea of closing two schools was discussed. We are trying to move slowly and conservatively. Mr. Anastos does not see growth, but maintenance of size. Mr. Baxter asked what tool was used and the baseline for these scenarios. Dr. Potter stated that the demographer used by the District is the second leading demographer for California. The software included a wide range of assumptions and variables. They looked at data 10 years forward and 10 years back. They looked at districts throughout the state. Lemon Grove has a low birth rate. Housing is expensive in San Diego and the state, so families with children cannot afford to live here. The state has 12.2% unemployment. The country has been in a recession for two years. This may end around 2014. DecisionInsite looked at declining enrollment throughout the state and

scenarios that would impact students least. Unique to California is how the state is funded through sales and income taxes and not so much property tax. The state has a \$40 billion budget gap; 41% of the state budget is education. Education will continue to take a cut. Mr. Baxter asked what the margin of error is. What if enrollment goes up in the next two years? Mr. Anastos responded that the District will continue to handle the opening of the school year as we have. We put together a lean program to get an idea of enrollment. We will not get rid of properties, but would repurpose schools to accommodate preschools or office space so schools would be available if needed. Mr. Baxter asked if other districts have increased their enrollment. Ms. Brown stated that part of why Proposition W passed was to transform LGMS to provide the best for our children and also to attract students from outside the District. We need to be more creative to make facilities more attractive. The District has also added the Dual Language Immersion and AP Spanish programs. An adequate education is not enough. We have to change traditional thinking. Mr. Baxter asked if enrollment increased due to the addition of the Dual Language program and will it increase next year? If it is not a viable program, then it needs to be eliminated. Other language immersion programs have more than two languages taught.

- Analisa Howard asked how many families are leaving the District. Not everyone living in the District is aged out. We need to look at student performance. Making other schools larger will not encourage families to stay in the District. Will sixth graders remain at Vista La Mesa? Mr. Anastos stated that changes happen going from an elementary to a middle school. He feels our programs are good, but we want better. We recognize that that is an issue. Two years ago, after the first sixth grade at Vista La Mesa, we talked about adding seventh grade or making the school K-8. That is another possibility. We are willing to look at all options. We could make Vista La Mesa a K-8 school. In response to concern about parking issues at the school, the District is making changes. Currently, there are 30 adults taking a class on the Vista La Mesa campus, which increases parking problems. The school also has the largest preschool. In response to a comment from Ms. Howard that she would not send her children to a District middle school, Mr. Loschen asked why she would not. Ms. Howard stated that she found the campus scary and a very different environment. She also mentioned volunteering and having parents taking a bigger part of their children's education. Mrs. Dexter thanked everyone for coming. The decisions that need to be made are not easy. They impact families and staff. Mrs. Dexter mentioned all of her ties to the District. She cannot make a decision without community input. We are looking at every avenue to bring students into the District and keep them here. We cannot do it without the funding. The presence of those in attendance sends a message to the Board. Mr. Bass commented on the community's involvement tonight showing that you care as does the Board.
- Myra Garcia thanked the Board for the opportunity to be here. She asked what parents can do for the Board to make a decision as soon as possible? It's not the walls in a building but the staff that makes students successful. The bottom line is that the economy is not ours to fix. She asked for any suggestions they can do as parents.
- Mary Rollins commented that Monterey Heights School has the most history. She would hate to see the school closed just because it is older. She would rather see a school closed than to lose teachers. She asked if there is anything we can do to stabilize teachers regarding layoffs. That impacts every part of their lives, their work, and our children. The biggest concern with closing LGMS is the extracurricular activities, i.e. the band program. By moving students to Palm Middle, how will sixth graders continue to receive the same education? Mr. Anastos stated that we will have to work on that. There is no interest in eliminating the band program. Ms. Rollins stated that eliminating the band program for sixth grade students negatively impacts the students. Younger children are impacted by the loss of teachers. Is there some way to minimize some of that change for elementary school children? She suggested transitioning students from existing schools to be closed by not taking any new kindergarten children and move first graders to the other school. She thinks that the change to middle school students is easier than for the younger children.
- Alana Snyder asked that Monterey Heights not be closed. She asked how the EDP program would change. By changing to a four-day week, the school day would be longer and allow more time in the day to teach. Although her child is in kindergarten, she is already thinking of sending the child to another school for middle school. She likes the scenario for closing LGMS, but will understand any decision that needs to be made.
- Maria McClellan asked why the District doesn't create a magnet school rather than waiting two years. She thinks that can raise enrollment now.
- Donald McKnight asked if the block schedule for ELA and math would be offered at Palm Middle. Mr. Anastos stated that if a decision is made to combine the two middle schools,

there would be existing staff of both schools. That would be one of those big conversations needed. We will work on that. Mr. McKnight asked about the AVID program teaching ELA and math. Mr. Little stated that Palm Middle offers two periods as AVID electives.

- Cary Demaree stated that he and his wife researched San Altos, looking at testing showing the school high above the District, before selecting to send their child to the school. They are involved in PTA to help their son and the school's students. Ms. Brown returned to Ms. McClellan question about why the District is not going forward with STEM. Ms Brown explained that we needed to pass a bond to fund the STEM school. There are oversight and special committees that Ms. Brown encouraged parents to join to help provide direction to the Board. Mr. Shaw stated that the District's 1:1 program is unique. We are looking at other ideas for elements to increase the enrollment. Passing the bond is a way to generate money, and we are responding.
- Angie Paul expressed thanks for answering questions. She supports the scenario to close LGMS. Can San Altos School accommodate more students? Is the District planning to invest money to fix Monterey Heights School? San Altos School doesn't need repairing.
- Roy McClish stated that the Dual Language Immersion program is the only reason his children are in the District. He mentioned the loyalties to LGMS and the students wanting to graduate from this school. He expressed concern about mixing Lions and Panthers at one school and the potential issues from combining the schools' students. He suggested K-8 at Vista La Mesa and Golden Avenue and keeping LGMS open. He suggested creating revenue for the District by producing something like t-shirts that the community can purchase to offset cuts. Mrs. Dexter stated that it is a good point about the loyalties to LGMS and suggested a dual graduation may be in order to soften the blow. As far as fundraising, we have looked at some ideas. We have built partnerships to help fund our technology. We need ideas for businesses to help fund our programs.
- Guadalupe Sasamine commented on the District getting rid of good teachers over the years. Students don't want to go to school because of problems with teachers. She asked why teachers are here if they don't want to teach. Mr. Shaw stated that the District lost a lot of good teachers last year through retirement. Mrs. Dexter stated that contracts and seniority determine layoffs.
- Mr. McKnight asked if San Altos is large enough for K-8? Mr. Anastos stated that Districtwide, there is space for another 1000 students. Each campus has a room or two used at the school's discretion that could be used as a classroom. He mentioned that seventh and eighth grade programs are more differentiated. Additionally, those students need to be provided PE. Middle school teachers teach in content areas or departments rather than teaching all subjects.
- Mr. Shaw thanked everyone for attending this forum. The Board appreciates your comments. your presence, and all that you have done and are doing. The closure of a school will begin next school year, 2010-2011.
- Patricia Tanaka asked if there is anything parents can do to help repair the school by volunteering time or materials. Mr. Fine stated that he appreciates the offer. One of the projects for Monterey Heights would be to add ADA ramps. There are liability and labor contract issues with volunteers. Volunteers cannot do CSEA work. We can have more conversations about donations of goods. Mr. Anastos stated that decisions have not been made, but need to be addressed as soon as possible as this would take effect in August for the 2010-2011 school year. We are looking at ways to make the transition as easy as possible. There is a lot of work to do. The Board and staff can be reached by phone or email. This will be the only public forum for this topic. Parents were informed of the meeting via an all-call, information sent home by the schools, and the newspaper. A decision will be made at a regular meeting, perhaps February 23.
- Mr. Shaw again thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Next Board Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Governing Board will be held on Tuesday, January 26, 2010, at 5:00 p.m. at the Lemon Grove Community Center, 3146 School Lane, Lemon Grove.

Lemon Grove School District – 8025 Lincoln Street, Lemon Grove, CA 91945
Board of Education: Jay Bass - Blanca Lopez Brown - Katie Dexter - Larry Loschen - Timothy Shaw
Superintendent: Ernie Anastos