The Year-Round Achievement Center (YRAC) will receive a Golden Bell Award this year at a ceremony in San Francisco on December 4. The Golden Bell Awards recognizes California schools that demonstrate excellence in teaching or outstanding programs in 17 different categories of curriculum and instruction. YRAC's program—its teachers and administrators—were recognized for effectively raising the skill level of students identified under the District's policy of promotion and retention.

YRAC serves the 21 year-round schools in the District. It offers students an intensive four-week program to get them up to speed with students in their own grade. The school operates usually on four-week sessions, training students who are on a six-week break from year-round schools. This means 250 to 300 students per session. YRAC tests students and places them in small and collaborative groups, whole classes, or one-on-one depending on their needs.

They focus on one school per session, working with the year-around teachers to focus the program where the students need the most help. Most often the weaknesses require intensive study and practice in reading and writing, though some students will be engaged in math and reading programs. “It’s like camp,” says principal Howard Larimer. All the students are happy to be there because the program, Larimer continues, “instills in them a sense of success.

According to Larimer, that sense of success is a great deal of what the will to learn hinges on. The YRAC sees students improve because they work with other students who are at their same skill level. It reduces their fears of being wrong and increases their will to achieve. Larimer states that, “It’s the first time in their school careers that they know the answer.” Accomplishment brings the drive for more.

Larimer also pointed out that YRAC is a heavy diagnostic program and so measuring student success has been somewhat easier to follow than it might be in other types of schools. One test used to calibrate student success is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) in which students are expected to progress a certain amount of levels in each school year. The levels vary from year to year so in first grade a student is expected to go from level 3 to 16, while in fifth grade they should complete only level 45. Given the levels of expected growth the YRAC knows that their programs has seen the average first grader pass 3 levels in the four-week instruction.

It was a natural progression for Larimer to apply for the Golden Bell Award. To supplement the DRA statistics, Larimer and staff sent out a Developmental Survey to parents and administrators. Two-thirds came back indicating that they saw improvement in the student, and most stated they knew improvement occurred either because grades went up or tests scores improved. Larimer could also track his students through the Glass Test given three times a year to all students. He found the gap between his students who started reading comprehension at the 20% level and improved coming closer to the 60% level by the second administration of the Glass Test, which is the average for most classes on reading comprehension. It is not a surprise then that YRAC works and has gained and deserves this recognition by the Golden Bell Award program.

CART also gets Bell

The Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART), a cooperative venture that includes Fresno Unified School District, has been awarded the prestigious Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association (CFBA). CART was recognized for its innovative, sustainable and exemplary program and for its educators who have invested extra energy and time to increase student achievement. The award specifically recognizes the accomplishments of the CART teaching staff and its business partners to increase academic achievement.

CART provides an innovative learning environment that enables juniors and seniors from Fresno and Clovis unified school districts to make connections with their future. Students utilize technology to solve real world problems under the mentorship of dedicated teachers and business partners. At CART, students are connected with a range of possibilities for the present and future as they become immersed in a program of continuous improvement and begin to regard education as an opportunity to think, learn, do, and most of all, become vital members of their communities. The CSBA is a nonprofit association representing more than 1,000 K-12 school districts and county offices of education throughout California.
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Superintendent’s Message

Thank you for allowing me to serve since July as the Interim Superintendent in the Fresno Unified School District. For those of you who are critical of the district, I encourage you to volunteer for an extended period of time in the schools before you make judgments about the district. There are certainly educational and fiscal challenges facing the district, but blaming individuals or groups leads to erroneous conclusions and perpetuates the downward spiral of the district and the community.

I am pleased that my friend and colleague Chuck McCully is returning as Interim Superintendent. I have a long association with Mr. McCully, and I know that he wants to return the district’s focus to children and learning. He is a sensitive, intelligent, and experienced leader who can assist the board during what is expected to be a challenging time of budget adjustments, personnel changes, and academic challenges.

There is, as I was warned a “Fresno Unified Culture” that has been built over the years as the district changed from a suburban district to an urban district with big city problems and economics. This change has caused instability in finances, changes in leadership, and damaged relationships among many segments of the community. I have noted that some in the community and the community want to continue the discussions of despair, hopelessness, and blaming of others. This type of behavior will not lead to improved academic achievement, better working conditions, or increased community support. Such behavior will not support or maintain a focus on children and learning.

From my first day in the district last July, I have heard from many employees and community leaders that the budget in Fresno Unified could not be trusted. Even when I asked the County Superintendent to bring the Fiscal Crisis Management Assistance Team to audit the books, I heard that this was merely a reactionary move and that FCMAT was just another management trick. When the budget was balanced by my not taking a salary, cutting $240,000 from the superintendent’s office budget, not hiring two central office administrators, eliminating $1 million in counselor assistants, adjusting energy costs, cutting elementary music, and eliminating elementary librarians, I was told, “See we told you there was no budget problem.” I find that type of rhetoric to be harmful to the education of children and the district’s public image.

The District continues to value employees and believes we should offer competitive salaries and fringe benefits. It seems that many in the community and the district are resistant to change and refuse to acknowledge that adjustments to curriculum and fringe benefits must adapt to new conditions. A good example is the cost of health and welfare benefits. It was a wonderful idea to provide low cost benefits for all employees and free coverage for all retirees twenty years ago. But, healthcare is now a national crisis and the district is not immune to changing conditions. Recently, a professional told me that he paid $700 per month for healthcare for his family. Many others in the community have reacted with shock when they learn that employees here pay very little for healthcare and that retirees have uncapped benefits for themselves and their dependents for life.

When management and labor agreed to this plan it was a different era. Both sides need to put aside old, outdated labor relations behaviors and system that has cap on benefits. If not, the district faces cuts to the classroom. As a principal recently told the board at a public meeting, nothing else can cut that won’t directly affect the students in the classroom.

I have visited schools and seen wonderful teachers and classified employees working diligently to improve the lives of children. They have rightfully chosen not to pay attention to the negative press, the political battles, and the union and management problems in the district. These individuals complicate their work and detract from their focus on teaching. But, they are aware of the lack of community support, the allegations in the press, the negative rhetoric of many factions in the district and it makes them sad and discouraged. They want to work with children in a district that has pride, stability, and community support. The board will not find a hero for the permanent superintendent who will save the district. The community will not find a villain that has sought to hurt children, lose money, or lower test scores. What they will find is a system that has cap on benefits. If not, the district faces cuts to the classroom. As a principal recently told the board at a public meeting, nothing else can cut that won’t directly affect the students in the classroom.

The solution is complex, challenging, and difficult. Many must give up old behaviors and speak new words. All of the adults who have been given the responsibility of educating over 80,000 children are obligated to solve this crisis using their mature skills of reconciliation, dialogue, and compromise. There is a lack of trust between citizens, administrators, unions and the media that is keeping the district from addressing the appalling student achievement in the district. Finger pointing, blaming, name calling, and other traditional tactics are keeping the district from doing its primary educational work.

Those who hold positions of power in the district and the community should now put aside old positional behaviors and solve the economic problems that are facing the district. They are the leaders, and they are people with good hearts who care deeply about the district from their own guarded silos. It is now time for them to let go of their personal grudges and hostilities, and seek to forgive others for past misunderstandings. The cost of not taking this road will result in more declines in the community.

For those of you on the sidelines being critical of the district, we need your help. Come and volunteer. From personal experience, I can assure you that you will see that there are no easy answers. You will grow from the experience, and you will be able to help build a community that needs daily support.

Walt Buster, Ed.D.
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Board President’s Message

Students and parents had an excellent opportunity to watch democracy at work on Nov. 2 as voters in the Fresno Unified School District elected three new representatives to the District’s Governing Board.

I would like to welcome new members Valerie F. Davis, Carol Mills and Janet Ryan who will be sworn in on Dec. 8 and also congratulate Manuel Nunez who won re-election. They will join Luisa Medina, Tony Vang and me to make up your Governing Board.

Our first task will be to roll up our sleeves and get down to the business of making this a school district in which all stakeholders will take pride. It will not be an easy task, but we do have a good base from which to build.

Please take a look on the pages of this issue of Building Futures to see all of the wonderful things that are happening in Fresno Unified. These are success stories you won’t find in your mainstream media, yet they reflect the successes happening every day in Fresno Unified.

I would like you to focus on the positives. Our programs are earning recognition. Our people are earning recognition on the national and state level. Our students are learning and earning recognition. These are successes we can build upon. These are the foundation of Fresno Unified.

Certainly the District faces challenges and we are prepared to face those challenges and determine solutions that will result in positive outcomes. We don’t intend to hide those challenges, we want to bring them to the fore, to talk about them, determine what to do about them and then overcome them.

We will begin our new term with a familiar face at the helm. Chuck McCully, who was Superintendent of the District more than a decade ago, has agreed to return on an interim basis to help guide us through the tough decisions we will face. Interim Superintendent Walt Buster has helped us prioritize those challenges and prepared us for the task at hand. I wish to publicly thank him for his unselfish desire to help the District become better.

We welcome our new members who will bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to find those solutions. Fresno Unified is the fourth largest school district in the state. It is on the cutting edge of societal and demographic changes taking place throughout the United States. With a positive attitude and a willingness to make tough decisions, we can become a model for others to follow.

Again, I welcome our newest Board Members and I am confident that we will have a positive outcome.
If you are part of a school organization, a student, a parent of a student, or related to someone who is you are probably eligible to join EECU!

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www.eecufresno.org
New school will honor Fresno pioneer Bakman

When Mollie Bakman planted roots in Fresno in 1929 – literally and figuratively – she could not have known how deeply they would grow.

The Fresno Unified School District broke ground Sept. 9 for Mollie Bakman Elementary School in the very soil on which she grew peaches and other commodities.

The school is one of 10 either under construction or planned in FLUSD. The campus will be composed of a two-story building of classrooms surrounded by auxiliary buildings, kindergarten rooms and a preschool. The school is designed to serve the community with soccer fields, baseball diamonds and an outside amphitheater.

The construction money is from the $199 million bond approved by voters in 2001 through Measure K.

The two-story Bakman School is under construction on 8 1/2 acres of the original family ranch at Belmont and Helm avenues. It is expected to be completed in time for the 2005-06 school year.

FLUSD officials said the campus will be a center for the diverse community it will serve.

More than 20 descendants of Mollie Bakman attended the ceremony with some participating in the ceremonial turning of the dirt with gold-painted shovels.

“It’s wonderful to have the opportunity to continue farming: farming of the mind and cultivation of personalities,” said Tim Bakman, grandson of Mollie. “It’s a beautiful thing.”

Interim Superintendent Dr. Walt Buster said the District will plant peach trees as the school’s first landscaping to honor Bakman’s reverence for the beauty of the peach.

The Bakman family originally farmed in North Hollywood. Mollie’s husband, Charles, died in 1919 and 10 years later Mollie set out for Fresno, attended the ceremony with some participating in the ceremonial turning of the dirt with gold-painted shovels.

“At first landscaping to honor Bakman’s reverence for the beauty of the peach. The Bakman family originally farmed in North Hollywood. Mollie’s husband, Charles, died in 1919 and 10 years later Mollie set out for Fresno, looking for a more fertile ground to farm. Mollie found a place in North Hollywood, and with the help of her children, they started a new life. They had 160 acres and grew peaches, cotton, grapes and alfalfa. The family also operated a small dairy.

Bakman, grandson of Mollie Bakman, breaks ground for school named for Fresno pioneer.

“What better place to have a school than in an area with ethnic diversity, where children and families, a lot of them, are starting over again,” said Tim Bakman.

Parrish sweeps awards before her retirement

Diane Parrish went out with a bang. Although she officially retired from her Fresno Unified School District duties July 30, she was invited to Washington, D.C. in October to receive the most prestigious of all the education awards she earned during an illustrious 32-year career in Fresno.

The former Baird School Principal was named California’s 2004 Middle School Principal of the Year by the National Association of School Administrators. The award sits alongside the 2003 Principal of the Year Award from the Association of California School Administrators. She also was named the City of Fresno’s Administrator of the Year in 1992 and the Fresno County Administrator of the Year in 1993.

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Fort Miller trains students for fields in medicine

Fort Miller is more than a preparatory middle school. It also provides training for students in the field of medicine and is in sync with a growing medical industry in Fresno. The magnet school for junior high school students opened in 2000 and is in its 4th year. It was the brainchild of Principal Jack Moore and Gerlinde Wirzfeld-Olvera and other staff who applied for a grant from the National Science Foundation five years ago.

Organized on a traditional school year, the preparatory school uses block scheduling for 7 period classes. The school’s entire enrollment is just below 800 students. The Medical Career Center Program has attracted 80 eighth-graders and 115 seventh-graders.

All students are welcomed to the program and need only fill out an application, which are selected on a lottery basis. The school has students of all skill levels and socio-economic backgrounds. And students who fall in low-income groups can receive financial help. The faculty hopes to expand the numbers involved in the school on a yearly basis. This year four classrooms have been opened for students, up from three just last year.

This budding program illustrates the wonder of a growing web of links between schools and community. The Program enjoys a partnership with Valley Children’s Medical Center. The students matriculate to Sunnyside Doctor’s Academy, McLane Medical Magnet, Roosevelt Health Academy, and the Center for Academic Research and Technology. In addition, teachers in the school are able to enhance their curriculum with real case examples.

Fort Miller’s partnership with Valley Children’s Medical Center allows students to have hands-on experience in the medical field. During the school year, students make visits and tour the hospital, speakers come to the school to discuss topics in the medical field, and some students do shadowing of workers at the hospital. So, student’s eyes are opened and curiosity touched by variety in experience. Every student is involved in these experiences.

Teachers then have an opportunity to integrate the experience in to the regular class work in maths, sciences, language arts and social studies programs.

The program enjoys strong ties to magnet schools for health and medicine. Carol says that a particularly strong connection is maintained with Duncan High where there is a Nursing and Veteran Program. Fort Miller students work with Duncan students on many projects. One activity that really draws the students, Carol explain, is a mock-up plane crash. Dun-can High students set up the plane crash. Fort Miller students then practice triage. It’s students training students that makes a difference. It is not surprising that so many Fort Miller students tend to matriculate to Duncan High.

Fort Miller’s Medical Careers Center is enjoying unexpected success because it provides students with guidance beyond high school. In truth, they want to pave the way to college for their students. The school welcomes speakers from and takes field trips to colleges and universities.

They go to tour Fresno City College and Fresno State. The Seventh Grade goes to Stanford and the Eight Grade to University of California, Davis to tour the campuses. They experience both private and public institutions. Fort Miller, in this way, opens doors to the future in a medical career.

Even if students find medicine is not their ideal career, the school offers training in leadership, public service, and job interviews. Students take personal surveys and receive counseling so that they might learn their strengths and weaknesses. Student clubs, like the Nutritional Advocate Program, while facilitated by Mrs. Anguiano, is student driven. Thus, the students decided last year to yank the soda machines and replace them with fruit juice machines. Students develop broad skills for their futures, much beyond the medical field.

Fort Miller faculty has learned a great deal about the medical profession and other technologies which have helped to enhance the classroom. Power Point presentations have help teachers, but more importantly, students now do presentations on Power Point. Faculty must rotate to provide this training in CPR and First Aid so that they keep up with the latest techniques and information.

The teachers are putting overtime to help administer the program, revealing that the faculty at Fort Miller care, above all else, about student success. Carol couldn’t be complementary enough about all the energy and devotion among faculty members.
District focuses effort to remove bullying

School yards and classrooms have long been the fertile hunting ground of bullies. Lacking the self-confidence necessary for resolute action, students in their adolescent and teenage years, and the especially vulnerable developmentally delayed, become victims of misguided aggressors. Worse yet, the bystanders suffer from their own inaction. Naturally, bullying hurts the victim; it even marks the questionable social skills of the aggressor—a disproportionate percentage of whom are once victims themselves. However, bystanders need tools and avenues for actions that free them of an amoral complicity.

The primary goal of Guidance and Counseling is to create a safe environment on the school grounds. “Schools should be places were students are not only free of violence, but also feel emotionally and socially safe.” Machado’s has tools by which it can take a proactive approach to the problem. Since bullies often strike out at those who are different—the “others” of the world—the Guidance and Counseling office provides schools with activities to encourage a celebration of our shared humanity, the most attractive part of which is the diversity.

Such education opens students’ eyes, creating understanding and thus developing skills for empathy. Open eyes mean less incidents of bullying. It is events like these that Machado hopes to inspire. Potential bullies might learn to empathize more if encouraged to understand “others.” These events dampen the bully’s urges by introducing both “other” and new social skills—empathy, impulse control, and problem-solving without violence—which will be important to success in life. Machado emphasizes that a safe school is the crust of the program. Each school has a consistent and clear reporting and response process for students when harassment does happen, a process which is supported district-wide. Victims and bystanders need a sense of security against further aggression. So, the District’s work is an ongoing effort to improve and raise awareness.

The District asks the question, what conditions lead to that character flaw that has been a central aspect of human nature? Answers to this question help administrators, staff, and faculty to deal with the day-to-day concerns, keeping a constant vigil. Because human nature also remains a constant, the District aims to change the conditions and social norms which foster bullying, making it undesirable and unacceptable. The Department of Curriculum is the first stop for anyone hoping to change the trends of violence perpetrated by bullies.

Terry Davis, Curriculum Specialist/Health Education, explains the District is actively seeking new ways to help the victim, bullies and bystanders. Everyone loses if the community does not deal with incidents of harassment, extortion, sexual extortation and other acts of cruelty consistent with bullying. Davis explains that “some students come ill-prepared with social skills to be successful at school.” These students are most likely to resort to violence and extortion to resolve the conflicts of youth.

In addition, the Committee for Children has written the Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum, Preschool to Grade 8, which provides invaluable resources and advice for teachers and parents to help prevent bullying. Davis’s department trains teachers to deal with incidents, but more importantly to teach students alternatives to aggressive behavior before problems arise. “Youth often lack social skills such as impulse control, empathy, and problem solving that will help them to be successful in life. So, staff and faculty training—while addressing an immediate climate of aggression—is intended, above all, to alter conditions and norms that lead to bullying as acceptable social interaction. Administrators, faculty, and staff seeking advice and prescriptions for action can find resources through the Department of Curriculum.

The first observation made by Kendra Rosander, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, is that “developmentally delayed students are especially vulnerable to bullying and harassment because they are friendly, trusting, and usually lack awareness.” According to Rosander, their innocence makes the impact of bullying deep and long-lasting. Harassment and especially the crimes of sexual predators devastate developmentally delayed victims, and families who are all too aware of their child’s vulnerability.

Special education students often need consistent, updated training and re-training on how to handle bullies of all types. Rosander’s department brings in specialists to sites to help schools at all levels both understand and address the problems. It is an especially egregious problem, says Rosander because it is “widespread and often hard to detect.”

Thus, the Department of Special Education also provides especially school administrators with in-service training to help identify problems before they happen. They provide similar seminars and training for parents, faculty, and staff. One area the District is trying to increase awareness is with staff that interact with students outside the classroom. “Often bus drivers, crossing guards, aides, and playground supervisors will see or sense a threatening relationship first,” explains Rosander. To this end, the Department of Special Education has invited Dave Hingsburger, a specialist on sexual molestation, to address every school site, bringing curriculum and training to parents, staff, faculty and administrators.

At every level the school has increased its efforts to address bullying from all sides, opening the eyes of bullies, securing channels to assist both victim and bystanders, and, finally, educating and providing resources for students, staff, faculty, administrator and parent. The District has spread the net wide to capture the entire community. After all it is the community that suffers should bullying find a niche.
Civil War Re-enactment at Kearney Mansion attracts 150 Baird students

On the bloody battlefields from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, Americans of Blue and Gray stumbled out of the nineteenth century and blundered in to the twentieth.

The entire eighth-grade class at Baird Middle School participated in the Fresno Historical Society’s Civil War Re-enactment at Kearney Mansion. Each year, Fresno Historical Society re-enacts one battle on the great lawn in front of Kearney Mansion. This year, participants, including Baird students experienced the Battle of Spotsylvania. This battle, one in the Union’s Overland Campaign (1864) from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, continued for 20 hours in a downpour.

Baird eighth-graders—as with other students who were invited to attend on the Friday before the re-enactment opened to the general public—got first-hand insight into the tragedy of war, raising the question of the necessity of the human carnage. The students will also be inspired for their own recreation of the Civil War at Baird during their April Festival. More than 150 students from Baird took in the seeds of information that will finally bore fruit in April when they have their own chance to bring the Civil War to life.

Such dedication and foresight are typical of teachers and administration at Baird, a magnet school for foreign languages, technology, and agriculture. The students are engaged in festivals all year long that require extensive preparation. They research, often global civilizations in a specific time, create period-specific objects, and then display their work—and in case of the Civil War a re-enactment—acting as docents to a veritable museum.

A short stroll on the Baird campus leaves one in little doubt that individual creativity is nurtured at every turn. Student mosaics cover the walls; classrooms burst with projects; the gardens are cultivated, planted and harvested by students; and courtyards are tiled, designed and decorated by students. It seems only natural that Baird’s 8th Grade should be the largest crowd on the Kearney lawns and eager for participation, during this Friday showcase, the students explored information booths, displays, and even talked to historical figures from generals like Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, to the heroine of the Underground Railroad Harriet Tubman, and literary greats Walt Whitman and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Kearney lawn is awash with students talking to experts on a variety of topics: weaponry, infantry, horses, fashion, social customs and politics. In short, students have an opportunity to be totally immersed in the Civil War.

Linda Boaen, the leader of Baird eighth-grade teaching team, explained that the experience was not only valuable in itself, but it provides knowledge they will soon use in their own Civil War re-enactment. It is a tribute to the eighth-grade team of teachers—Linda Boaen (history), Lorna Zuri (language arts), Martin Ouellette (Algebra), Ann Wimer (P.E.), and Doug Finks (Science)—who bring life and depth to the learning process.

Nutrition and nurture top food service priorities for District

District food service professionals provide daily breakfast, snacks and lunches for nearly 85,000 students. With the nutrition of students carefully provided for, the school has a solid foundation on which to build education. In September alone, Food Services served 381,631 breakfasts, 1,010,181 lunches, and 54,885 snacks. Above, Sally Lara helps two Mayfair students with their morning snack. Students and the District depend on the dedication of Lara and her co-workers to keep the food services running smoothly for the 4th largest district in California.

December 17
Deadline for Open Enrollment

December 17th is the deadline for Student Transfers under Open Enrollment, Magnet School Applications, and Choice Transfers for the 2005-06 school year. This is a wonderful opportunity to request a school program from among the many unique program options available to help meet the educational needs of students. All students are eligible to apply for Magnet school programs and transfers to other exciting schools in Fresno during this Open Enrollment period which started in October and runs through December 17, 2004. Transfer requests, which meet required conditions, are approved at the Student Services Transfers Office according to space availability. Open Enrollment forms and Magnet applications are available at all schools, the Student Services Office at 1350 M Street and on the District website.

For further assistance and guidance about the many opportunities available for students, please call the Transfers Office at 457-3343 or consult the Parent & Student Handbook (pages 4-8; II-12), which is also available on the district website.

Information on No Child Left Behind “Choice Transfers” can be obtained by calling the School Choice Office at 457-3672.
Bullard High welcomes 3 Rotary exchange students

Travel to a foreign country opens a new world for students. Few experiences are so life changing for so many worldwide. Learning about other cultures broadens understanding between nations of the world. This is the goal of District 5230 Rotary Youth Exchange as it welcomes students each year into Central California.

The District has three international students this year at Bullard High School from Tajikistan, Ecuador, and Thailand. These students come from regions half way around the world where food and schooling are worlds away from their new Fresno homes. American culture naturally holds daily surprises. The very basics hold seeming oddities for the Tajik student who explains “the food and school are different. In Tajikistan I had eleven classes, but couldn’t get the classes that I wanted. But school didn’t go all day long. There wasn’t so much food and drink.” Rotary International devotes itself to peace worldwide achieved through knowledge and respect for world cultures. To this end, they host foreign students in the United States and send American students to other countries. The program is open to all students 15 to 18 years old interested in foreign cultures and citizenship. Local rotary clubs sponsor these students. North Fresno Rotary sponsored the student from Ecuador, Thai Rotary sponsored the student from Thailand, and Fig Garden Rotary sponsored the student from Tajikistan. For the Thai student, the US experience is entirely new. She misunderstands some of what her school friends say, but knows she will improve. “Everything is different from Thailand and it is difficult to adapt.” It is not easy being an exchange student, because language barriers are always imposing, but for the Thai student poses only a very little barrier to becoming involved in activities like a native. The Thai student with an unusual maturity recognizes that still “it is a good experience for one year.” She can perfect her English, but more importantly learn cultural practices and expectations unique to the United States.

The Tajik student, coming all the way from mountainous Tajikistan in Central Asia, has encountered a new and amazing market economy which while not absent from his own former Soviet Republic certainly lacks the volume and excesses of a democratic, corporate America. “I like democracy. Now I am here and I can see and say that it is a good life,” he says. That is a broadminded statement from a young man who knows four languages—Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, and English—and comes from a city 2,500 years old.

This opening of worlds is the goal behind the Rotary Youth Exchange. “We want our foreign students to take home a liberal understanding of American culture.”

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Options offered to serve 2,000 of FUSD’s youngest children

Many of you have heard ads on T.V. and radio: “Preschool will help your child be successful in school and later on in life.” What some parents do not know is that Fresno Unified has three high quality Early Childhood Education Programs that can help prepare young children for learning: the Child Development Center Program, the Parent and Child Education Program and the Preschool Program. All three programs provide research-based instructional strategies, highly qualified teachers, and a strong parent partnership to complement.

The Child Development Center (CDC) Program offers high quality affordable all day child care and enrichment activities for children ages 2-5 years and after school care for children ages 5 – 9 at four school sites: King, Heaton, Scandinavian and Webster. The Child Development Centers serve 275 children from qualified families based on income and need with priority given to children referred by Child Protective Services. Parents qualify for need by working, attending school, or participating in job-training programs. Fees are levied on a sliding schedule based on a family’s income. The CDC Program operates from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and serves a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack daily. The curriculum is based on developmental principles that build on the children’s existing strengths and weaknesses. Through daily observations and on-going assessment with the Desired Results Developmental Profiles, adults provide activities that encourage the children to develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Teacher’s daily lesson plans reflect activities that will help the children progress throughout the year. Each CDC classroom is staffed with a qualified teacher who holds a Child Development Teacher’s Permit and Child Care Assistants. The families and staff are supported by a nurse, a counselor, and a resource teacher who provide health services, referrals, parent meetings, staff trainings, and individual support. For enrollment information call 457-3684.

The Parent and Child Education (PACE) Program provides free child care and parenting education for teen parents who attend Fresno Unified Schools. This drop out prevention program has a successful history of helping pregnant and parenting teens stay in school and graduate. Approximately 1,200 PACE teen parents have graduated from high school since the program began 1975. The PACE Centers offer quality infant, toddler, and preschool care at Cambridge, De Wolf, Edison, Fresno, and Roosevelt High Schools. Each site has qualified Child Development Center Permit Teachers and Teacher’s Assistants. Trained staff provide developmentally appropriate activities for the infants and toddlers based on observations and the developmental profile assessments for each child. The PACE Program offers free child care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers whose parent attends school full-time and is progressing towards graduation. The teen mother or father must take 2 semesters of parenting education and work in the PACE Center alongside teachers who model appropriate practices. The PACE nurse, home liaison and site supervisor support the teens by offering education and referrals to needed services. The Program helps teens graduate from high school, become better parents, and plan for future education and careers to become self-sufficient. Enrollment information is available at 457-3680.

The Preschool Program is the largest Early Childhood Program in Fresno Unified with over 1,500 four-year-old children enrolled. The 84 classes operating on 38 different elementary school campuses prepare children socially and academically to be successful in kindergarten. The three-hour Preschool sessions are free to qualified parents who are required to participate in the classroom 6 hours each month. The curriculum provides socialization activities, strong oral language, and literacy emphasis, math and science exploration, opportunities for small and large muscle development and nutritious meals. Teachers observe and record each child’s progress with the Desired Results Developmental Profile and share the findings with the parents at two required conferences. Each classroom has a qualified teacher with a Child Development Teacher Permit, a Teacher’s Assistant and parent volunteers. The Preschool families and classrooms have the support of two nurses, two psychologists, two speech and language teachers and a resource teacher to provide health and language screenings as well as student, parent, and teacher services and referrals. Although the Preschool Program has grown 20% in the last three years, there continues to be a strong need for more preschool services. For more information on Preschool, call 457-3682.

Research tells us that young children who attend quality early education programs enter kindergarten better prepared to learn, have greater knowledge of verbal and numerical concepts and have opportunities for positive social interactions. The ECE programs listed above offer enriched environments including nutritious meals, emotional support, positive social interactions, and a broad range of learning activities. These programs support parents as the primary teacher and offer trainings and parent meetings to help parents succeed. As a valued part of FUSD, Early Childhood Education provides a first connection to school, a transition to elementary education, and early learning which is the basis of future success.

Sunnyside Choir invited to perform for California Music Education Association

The Sunnyside High School Chamber Choir, Cantus Vocem, has been honored with an invitation to perform for music professionals around the state at the 2005 California Music Education Association convention. Each year top bands, choirs and orchestras from elementary through college are chosen by application and audition to perform for their toughest audience: fellow music educators. To raise money for this event and other festivals this year, the choir will be presenting a song and dance medley called, “Encore! The Music of Our Times.” The group will also present a 30-minute caroling program featuring secular and sacred music old and new, with a lot of holiday cheer. To book the group, contact director Robert Bullwinkel at 253-6758.

www.fresnounified.org Building Futures November 2004
Robinson students link with Costco for supplies

Robinson Elementary School students proudly pose with their new backpacks provided by Costco at the beginning of the school year.

Robinson Elementary was chosen as a collaborative partner for Costco’s national program. Melodie Williams, the school manager, entered Robinson Elementary in the pool of schools, and in May 2005 the principal, Ray Avila learned his school would be the beneficiary of a year-long collaboration with Costco. Avila said that, “parents, teachers, and student were excited about the Costco partnership, understanding what a distinction it meant for the school.”

A distinction and much more will come to Robinson Elementary from this relationship. Costco gives free supplies and gift cards redeemable for products sold by the company, all of which will amount to hundreds of dollars by year’s end. Even this early in the year, the support has led to some significant gifts from Costco.The most important donation, according to Principal Avila, has been the backpack and supplies donation. Costco provided 550 backpacks including school supplies—pencils, markers, erasers, rulers and glue sticks—for every student at Robinson Elementary. These supplies are basic to a fertile learning environment for the modern student. It is a small beginning to the cultivation of the mind, but a necessary one.

In fact, Avila remarked that “the students take great pride in their backpacks” which is a step on the ladder to pride in education and knowledge that is necessary as our world enters the twenty-first century. “It is hard to get students stuck on education if it isn’t a priority, and especially if they are frustrated by the lack of resources. Companies like Costco realize in the modern age that their community service money is best allocated to educating our youth. Robinson Elementary will benefit from other cash donations from Costco. With vouchers to the store, the school will be able to buy supplies for all their community events. Their Back-to-School-Night barbecue received food from Costco; Sixth-grade camp will receive invaluable supplies; on Grandparent’s Day, cakes were bought from Costco; and the Spring Carnival will receive numerous supplies. The collaboration promotes the connection of community and elementary school.

Tehipite students make decisions on government

There was no mud slinging nor troops of lawyers present as students at Tehipite Middle School in Fresno Unified School District went to the polls early.

Instead there was orderly voter registration and polling as the students used actual voting booths provided by the Fresno County Elections Department to select members of the School Site Council.

“It gives the students a more meaningful voting experience,” said Felicia Olais, Program Manager at Tehipite, who with Teacher Ed Hagopian arranged for the use of the real voting booths.

The school held a “meet the candidates day” where each of the candidates were given time to speak before an assembled student body in the quad. The candidates each wrote “candidate statements” that were posted where they could be read by students who planned to vote.

The students took their responsibilities very seriously, she said. “It’s more than just a popularity contest.”

“I studied the candidates. I know how they act and who will be a good council member,” said an eighth-grade student.

The elected students will join parents and teachers as members of the School Site Council.

Eighth-grader votes in school elections prior to presidential elections.

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Wishon’s Jill Nakamura named to national newspaper’s Top 20 list

What we may see as a miracle is the norm for Wishon School first grade teacher Jill Nakamura. She just sets the bar higher than what we expect — in many cases, way higher.

“I have a positive attitude and tell the students to have a positive attitude,” she said. “You just have to raise their expectations and they will perform.”

Nakamura’s high expectations were recognized this school year when she was named one of 20 educators selected as USA TODAY’s All-American Teacher Team. She will receive a $2,000 and a $500 cash award and will be featured in USA TODAY sometime during the school year.

Wishon School will receive $2,000.

Nakamura is in her 17th year with Fresno Unified School District. She has taught first- or second-graders throughout her tenure. She likes to have an influence when the children are young.

Nakamura helps a group of parents organize a reading club for the fourth grade students.

“One of her biggest miracles came when one of her first-graders at another FUSD school became a better reader than her fourth grade sister,” Nakamura said. “She helped a group of parents organize a reading club for the fourth grade students.

“After that experience, the parent of my first-grader went back to school,” Nakamura said. “She is now a teacher for Fresno Unified. She realized that she could make a difference, too.”

Nakamura said that’s her favorite thing about teaching, “seeing that I can make a difference. I can help them grow academically and socially.”

Julie Severns, Principal at Wishon Elementary School, nominated Nakamura for the USA TODAY award.

“Jill Nakamura is a leader in all areas, whether it is connecting with students and families, creating a positive learning environment, developing exemplary lessons and materials, building character in students or assessing student needs and providing interventions,” Severns wrote in her nomination.

“The respect of students for their teacher is evident in the looks on their faces. First graders listen attentively as Jill Nakamura reads from ‘If You Gave a Mouse a Cookie.”

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This year’s homecoming king is very special to the students of Hoover High School. A student with downs syndrome photoed above with the school’s Homecoming Queen, was elected Homecoming King for Hoover High School. When the student’s parents heard that he was nominated they were concerned that it was a joke. They talked with students who overwhelmingly stated, “we don’t look at him as special education, he is a really cool kid.” They explained that students at Hoover believe in all kids. Hoover has had a long standing reputation of being a school that fully includes and supports special education.

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