McLane on a new path to academic success

The words “respect and honor” have returned to McLane High School.

After six years in academic Purgatory, McLane has been notified that it has met the goals of President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” program. In fact, to shed the designation of a so-called “Program Improvement” School, McLane was required to meet the criteria for two years in a row. The Highlanders did it, and did it in style.

“It wasn’t me,” said Frank Silvestro, McLane’s principal for those two years. “It was our teachers. They spent numerous hours working with our kids. They developed strategies to go above and beyond in helping the students achieve.”

The No Child Left Behind program measures a school’s progress in four categories – its graduation rate, students’ proficiency in math and language arts and the percentage of eligible students who take the required test. Last year’s 80.5 percent graduation rate was the final hurdle. (All of the data can be found at www.cde.ca.gov, click on the AYP page).

“We’ve changed the culture of McLane,” Silvestro said. “We started at the bottom and worked our way up, but we know we can do an even better job. We know that learning is a journey we will undertake for the rest of our lives.

“We’ve become patient and persistent, but it’s a whole school effort. The kids and the teachers have the right attitude. We won’t let our kids fail.” Silvestro noted that 80 percent of McLane students qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

“That was an excuse at one time,” he said, “but our philosophy is that all kids can achieve, and all of them can achieve at a high level.”

Silvestro invited community members to visit McLane. He suspects many will be surprised at what they find.

“Our kids are polite, generous and kind. Those are our expectations and we don’t waiver.”

McLane’s 110 teachers sacrificed much of their own time to get the students on track. They each volunteered 40 unpaid hours during the summer to attend workshops on how to help the students. They meet for 80 minutes every Friday during the school year to exchange ideas.

Principal Frank Silvestro, far left, credits the staff and students with the hard work necessary to turn McLane High School into a winner.
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Superintendent’s Message

It has become obvious that we cannot compromise on the need for adequate safety and supervision on our campuses. Reductions in Campus Assistants, site administrators, and counselors have left the safety net for our students filled with large holes.

The Board of Education has taken steps to restore campus safety positions for the remainder of this school year. And I have pledged to recommend to the Board a budget for next year that begins to restore positions to provide for safety, libraries, and music.

It is my hope that in future years the District can restore counseling positions and can respond to our students’ instructional needs with flexibility and common sense.

In order to right the balance, we have no choice but to stem the relentless increase in the costs of health benefits for our employees. We value our employees and want them to continue to enjoy a package of benefits. But it must be one which is affordable now and sustainable over the long term.

Budgetary cutbacks of over $75 million in recent years are coming home to roost in ways that should make us all understand the urgency of righting the balance in how we spend the taxpayers’ money.

I have been heartened by the response of many of our employees and retirees. They understand the problem and want to be part of the answer. It remains to be seen, at this time, whether negotiations with our collective bargaining units will yield a timely and comprehensive solution to our severe fiscal imbalance.

In the meantime, I welcome the insistence of parents that their students’ safety be a top priority. And I welcome the pleas of our students that their fears and concerns be addressed, so that they can concentrate on their academic pursuits. I find strength and joy in the vitality of this community and in its resolve to "own" its school system. We have great students, caring parents, and first-rate employees. Working together, we will identify and resolve our problems, no matter what.

Board President’s Message

We need your support in making Fresno Unified a high performing school district. I believe, as a community, we can provide a quality education for all of our students. As a first step, the Board of Education adopted the five overarching goals listed in the Choosing Our Future, A "Community Wide Call to Action" report from the Superintendent’s Task Force. This guides our work over the next few years as we move this district forward.

Briefly stated, they are:

- Students to meet grade level proficiency in core academic subjects;
- English learners to advance one level per year in English language proficiency;
- Students to achieve their highest performance through a broad array of programs;
- Reduction of the dropout rate by 20% per year;
- Provide a safe learning environment.

In this edition of Building Futures, you will learn more about the many wonderful successes taking place daily in our schools: Edison High School’s unprecedented 1st place victory out of the last 3rd in the Academic Decathlon, the national recognition of our teachers, after school programs and the McLane’s progress toward academic excellence. Thank you to the many caring employees who work to support our children in their classrooms and maintain a focus on student learning.

There are so many individuals who want to help us ensure success for our students. It is heartwarming to see the tremendous support from parents, our employees and business and community organizations. For example, at a recent summit on “Closing the Achievement Gap”, we heard how barriers to student academic achievement could be eliminated through collaborative efforts with parents, educators and community partners.

Another partnership with the Volunteer Center enhances the safety for our student as they walk to school. They are in need of a few more volunteer crossing guards. This program was the first of its kind in the country, and provides safe crossing for about 15,000 elementary children. Each year volunteers are recognized at a barbecue at Woodward Park for the wonderful people who keep Fresno’s young children safe.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact the Volunteer Center at 237-3101. One by One volunteer crossing guards. This program was the first of its kind in the country, and provides safe crossing for about 15,000 elementary children. Each year volunteers are recognized at a barbecue at Woodward Park for the wonderful people who keep Fresno’s young children safe.

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www.eecufresno.org
It is 4 p.m. on a weekday afternoon as we walk through one of the elementary school campuses enrolled in the Fresno After School program. The program at this site enrolls more than 120 students, grades K-6, every day after school, so we expected to see children playing games on the grounds or climbing the playground equipment. As we were directed to the hallway on the west end and entered Room 3 we came upon an astonishing sight. Seated at classroom desks were approximately 20 children, each holding a different book and reading to themselves. Also in the room were several college and high school age students, each working with a younger student by reading to them, sounding out words, and helping them complete a study guide. On the chart stand directly in front of the students you could see a lesson apparently organized for that day and listing single words neatly in columns with the title, “Cool Words” spelled out across the chart. The tutor in charge of the room, called a Team Leader, would expertly move from student to student and ask them questions about what they are reading and check for understanding. Students would then quietly and attentively respond. What was equally astonishing is that every student was focused and completely immersed in the book they were reading. We just happened to walk into Room 3 during an Independent Reading Time on the schedule, and would be followed next with a project-based science enrichment activity for the rest of the afternoon. As we discussed the rich content of the schedule and noticing science was next, a student apparently overheard our conversation. Her name was Angela – about 8 years old and very excited. Drawing her attention toward us she sat up straight and excitedly said, “I love science, it’s so much fun!”

The Fresno After School program is the result of a partnership between Fresno Unified School District and Fresno CORAL (Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning) and operates program 5 days a week, 3 hours per day on school days. Staffed by trained coordinators and team leaders, the program includes homework tutorial, reading enrichment, science enrichment, math enrichment, art, music and other activities. “This focus on academic enrichment through an extended day and out-of-school program will result in greatly improved academic achievement for students,” stated Co-Directors Jerry Valadez and Roy Mendiola. The co-directors further stated, “Children of all ages come to our program instead of watching TV at home or getting into mischief or worse. In addition, interaction with Fresno After School staff and other adults is also highly nurturing in our after-school setting. These may not be measures of student achievement as measured by gains on a norm referenced test but they are just as significant in affecting children’s lives.” Principal Karen Osborne at Homan Elementary School is also very satisfied with the Fresno After School program. She states, “The students (at Homan Elementary) are really benefiting from the homework help and enrichment activities. I love it!”

The Fresno After School partnership was recently recognized as a “Closing the Achievement Gap Best Practice” by the Council of Great City Schools. Fresno After School program is currently offered at Columbus, Greenberg, Homan, Jefferson, Kirk, Leavenworth, Lincoln, Mayfair, and Webster elementary schools and at Carver Middle School, Sequoia Middle School, and Waterman Community Center. For more information you may contact Dr. Jerry D. Valadez at 248-7181 (FLUSD) or Dr. Roy Mendiola at 485-5513 (Fresno CORAL).

After school program wins praise
Edison students rocket to success

NASA awards contract to fly rocket exactly one mile above Earth

Representatives of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration visited Edison High School in early February to see how “their” rocket project was coming along.

NASA signed a contract with a group of extremely bright students at Edison to produce and launch the rocket. The scientists from Houston dropped by to congratulate the students and wish them success.

A team of rocketeers from Edison last year won a third place award in a national rocket-building competition sponsored by NASA. That allowed this year’s students to submit a proposal to NASA to build a rocket under the Student Launch Initiative.

Under the guidance of science teacher Norm Hieger, the students took on the Herculean task of designing and building a rocket that would reach an altitude of exactly one mile with an as-yet-to-be-determined scientific payload.

Their preliminary proposal was approved. NASA scientists then asked the students to submit a preliminary design. Seniors James Herrin, Chris Martzen and Annalee Asbury were instrumental in coming up with the “critical design” of a 3-inch diameter rocket that is just over 6 feet tall and will carry a payload of data loggers.

The students first built a scale model of their rocket using some computer-generated data. Then they built the real thing.

The students said they will use a number of test launches to determine how much propellant and ballast will be necessary to reach an altitude of 1 mile.

However, as Hieger pointed out, one doesn’t just go out into the schoolyard and launch a high-powered rocket. The students are required to obtain Federal Aviation Administration certification and clearances for their launches, which can only take place at a select few sites in Central California. The students most recent test launch was at Snow Ranch, located about 30 minutes east of Stockton.

The students measure the apex of the rocket’s flight and will add or subtract ballast to achieve the optimum height of 1 mile.

Support the Roosevelt School of the Arts

Recently, the Roosevelt School of the Arts (RSA) underwent a major renovation of its theatre. New seats are the last project yet to be completed at the school, and the students need your help. RSA will place a plaque and your name on its theatre seats for $100.

RSA opened its doors in 1984, the second magnet school in the District. It offers students classes in the fine arts to enhance their high school experience. Students take two elective courses from the arts program in addition to the five regular courses to fulfill their daily schedule. In addition, dance students can earn physical education credit for their courses.

Students have matriculated from RSA to schools and careers in the arts. RSA graduates have worked on Broadway, in dance troops, as composers and choreographers. Some students have found jobs in the film industry and even soap operas and other television series. They have joined jazz bands and orchestras. Even if students do not go on to glamorous careers in the entertainment industry, their classes at RSA are sure to enrich their lives. In short, the opportunities of RSA in the arts are unmatched anywhere in the District.

Nothing Builds Confidence Like Martial Arts

In fact, that’s what our students tell us they appreciate the most. After all, who wouldn’t enjoy knowing that they can handle themselves in nearly any situation? That’s not all. Our students also tell us their confidence is making a big difference in their relationships, their work and school. Plus, they’re getting in great shape.

Enhanced confidence and physical fitness... that’s the perfect combination. At our school, we give you the best of both worlds. So call us now to find out more about our special introductory class for beginners!

Members of the Edison High School SLI team assemble their rocket.

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More than a safety message

Webster Elementary School parent Michelle Jordan got in the Valentine’s Day spirit doing her crossing guard duties. The mother of a Webster second grader dressed up as a valentine and handed out candy to the students as they crossed the street safely. Michelle is one of many parent volunteers who help to ensure the safety of FUSD students.
Wawona Middle School may soon have a Farmer's Market due to the strong community partnerships now instrumental in the development of the school Garden Project. Wawona devoted 1 ½ acres to a school garden on which two greenhouses were built. The garden in the last two years has turned a new leaf.

Principal Mike Darling credits the generous contributions of community partners Wawona Frozen Foods and Western Farm Services. Bill Smitcamp, owner of Wawona Foods, has donated upwards of $10,000 in cash, supplies and labor to revitalize the garden and get the project underway. His donations include irrigation systems, protective roofing for the greenhouses, berry vines, planters, and gravel for the pathways, as well as all the labor necessary to make a working garden and laboratory for children.

Western Farm Services provided fertilizers, mulch, soils, and the citrus trees. Together these community partners have helped to bring life to the garden. More than a 100 students in the after school program have the opportunity to participate in garden activities and production.

Tammy Rinkenberg, Wawona’s science teacher who heads the project will also incorporate it into the seventh grade life science curriculum. Since the reproductive life cycle of plants is key to that curriculum, the seventh-graders will not only explore asexual reproduction including propagating plants with methods other than seeds such as cuttings from trees but also study methods of grafting. Students will learn about pollination requirements, analyze insect and weed control and, ultimately, examine how farming affects the environment—especially other methods of controlling pests besides pesticides and the all problems associated with agriculture in general.

Culturally, Rinkenberg said she hopes to have students cultivate plants from other cultures. Thus, she expects the program will change from year to year as the students explore different and new corps. In addition, she expects to harvest large crops which might be used for donations. She hopes to reach out to the community by donating extra crops to the Plant-A-Row for the Hungry which feeds the homeless.

This winter, the students cultivate lettuce, broccoli, and some remaining carrots and radishes in planter boxes over the winter. In the greenhouses are stored the orchards for the winter. In the springtime the garden will come to life with plants full of corn, tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers, and berry vines will bloom. The school hopes to hold classes outside on the intricacies of pruning, soil preparation, and explore botany as plants sprout, grow, flower and fruit.

Eventually Wawona Middle School will hold a Farmer’s Market with the produce from the garden so that students might also experience the commercial end of farming as well. They will also learn about the fragility and delicacy of nature. So, the students will grow in their knowledge of plant life from soil to market.
Frank Talk: Miss California reveals the importance of proper nutrition

Elizabeth Terronez Middle School welcomed Miss California Veena Goel in November. The school’s Program Manager, Sue Heth, invited Miss California to talk to the middle school students about eating disorders as part of her year campaign to help fight this serious problem that often starts when girls enter middle school. Goel’s own problems with anorexia and bulimia began at that time, when a young man told her she “might look pretty if she lost a few pounds.” So, began years of starvation.

There were no smiles for students who piled into the school library in groups to listen to the beauty queen. Miss California and 4th Runner-up for Miss America spoke about the grim facts of self-imposed starvation, scale obsession, binge-and-purge tactic, and the misuse of laxatives.

Girls in the sixth to the eighth grade listened to her battle with anorexia, an eating disorder by which a person starves their own body. Goel discussed the immediate problems of low body temperature, slowed heart rate, constipation and diarrhea, and psychological disorders including depression.

But as Goel reminded the girls, there are plenty of other long-term effects of anorexia. Muscle tissue is eaten away, bone marrow is lost, and the brain might even shrink. If muscle deterioration reaches the heart muscle, it can cause heart attack and other organ failure.

Perhaps, the greatest impact Goel had on Terronez sixth-to-eighth-grade girls is she appeared not more than a bag of bones, a walking skeleton with a ghastly appearance. Also, even that thin, Goel confesses that she still saw the same “overweight” person in the mirror.

Goel, like other beauty queens is expected to pursue a public service campaign during her year as Miss California. She is scheduled to appear around the state in a campaign to help young girls understand that eating disorders are not a solution to weight issues. Eating disorders often bring more and worse problems than they solve.

One of Goel’s major projects is to teach students the importance of proper nutrition. At Hildago Elementary School, Goel presented the students with a garden cart that she hopes will encourage students to remember the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. Through a combination of proper diets and good mental health, every woman can succeed in life.
Edison Advanced Placement teacher Toshio Demsey has won a Siemens Foundation Award.

**Edison Advanced Placement teacher wins Siemens Award**

As a student, Toshio Demsey was recognized for his ability to learn from Advanced Placement classes. Now, as a teacher, he has been recognized for his ability to teach those same classes.

Demsey was recently notified that he had been recognized as a Siemens Foundation Award winner for AP teachers. He will receive a plaque and a $1,000 cash award.

He is in his fourth year of teaching AP calculus at Edison High School. He also teaches one period of Algebra.

As a student at Sanger High, Demsey took AP classes and it earned him entrance into Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in management science. He brought that love of advanced calculus to Edison where he attempts to pass the enthusiasm on to his students.

The Siemens company recognizes science teachers in six regions of the country. Demsey was one of three science teachers recognized by Siemens in the Western Region of the United States.

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**McCardle Elementary School up for a Blue Ribbon Award**

McCardle Elementary School in Fresno was nominated for a Blue Ribbon Award.

The Blue Ribbon recognizes schools that are either academically superior in their state or have demonstrated dramatic improvement.

Kathy Dennen, school principal, said “I think it is an honor for the staff, the students, parents and community to be recognized as a school of distinction.”

As part of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the Blue Ribbon program is intended to help foster schools where every student—regardless of class, race, or gender—has the potential to learn and develop their talents, skills, and intellect as broadly as possible.

The Blue Ribbon will recognize McCardle Elementary School for becoming such an integral part of its students’ lives.
Although the overall youth smoking rates have declined since 1992, tobacco use among youth under age 17 still remains about 6% in California. You can report illegal youth tobacco sales to 2 local law enforcement or Call the STAKE Hotline number 1-(800) 5 ASK-4-ID.

Karen A. Adler
Author  "Maybe Donna Wants a Cheeseburger!"

The book recounts the students experiences as they struggle to understand the period of hibernation typical for reptiles in the autumn and winter months. The students rack their brains to solve the problem of a sluggish, uninspired turtle whose actions have slowed to a snail’s crawl. Normally, “it would take Donna 22 minutes to walk the length of a football field.” Adler weaves carefully chosen facts into an inspirational narrative that draws the student end as they read to find what has happened to Donna. Included in the book is a CD containing a song and narration of the story. Karen has decided to incorporate her love of music in her books for which she writes and performs the music. It is rare for an artist to incorporate so many art mediums into one work. “Maybe Donna Wants a Cheeseburger” will undoubtedly inspire the curiosity and stimulate the tastes of children for generations. Adler herself still loves to see excitement of students when they learn about animals. Adler explains, “It is amazing the amount of learning that takes place as children read and write about animals. Music seems to be a universal language that motivates all children.”

A recent publication was written in memory of a long-time resident of her classroom, Donna the turtle. “Maybe Donna Wants a Cheeseburger!” is the first in her collection of Adler Animals Anthologies.

Drawing by Yvette Hernandez, McLane High Senior and a winner of the Fresno County Youth Advocacy Coalition Advertisement Contest.

For more information, please contact the Fresno County Tobacco Prevention Program at (559) 445-3276.
Bullard’s Humanities Program graduates first seniors

Bullard’s Humanities Program graduated its first seniors in June 2004. The Program, conceived more than five years ago, deserves some attention as Bullard hopes to integrate a wealth of culture and tradition into the academic lives of students. The Humanities Program is a curriculum strand targeting the mid-level student struggling with the significance of school in their lives.

If a student chooses to follow this strand they will be exposed to cross-curriculum teaching that emphasizes specific literary and artistic works. Also, each grade level participates in a school trip each year. Freshmen spend time after school and between classes in meetings to organize the strands for their grade level. There are some 20-25 teachers that are involved in the Humanities curriculum strand so the program is a broad effort on the part of the school.

Sophomore Humanities students returned from a trip to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles to better their understanding of other cultures. The ninth-grade curriculum targets the Hispanic World, California culture, and individual development. Students read texts like the Odyssey, Steinbeck’s The Pearl, and some short stories by Gary Soto. In tenth-grade, topics focus on the development of western civilization; the students study scientific and religious thought, conquest of the “New World” and the struggle for democracy. Eleventh-graders approach the humanities from the view of the “other”: exploring topics in the immigrant experience. Finally, senior class explore topics in government and the modern industrial world. Bullard’s Humanities Program is a fine example of broad readings in humanities studies.

Please see Humanities, Page 14

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Signing Day at Edison

Seven Edison High School athletes signed letters of intent to accept Division 1 athletic scholarships.

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Decathlon

Continued from Page 5

and literature, mathematics, economics, social science, speech, interview and essay. The final event was the Super Quiz.

Each team is made up of three "A" students, three "B" students and three "C" students. The qualifying grades are from each student's previous two years of academic classes.

Mrkaich, who is in his fourth year of coaching the Edison team, said 16 students tried out for the nine positions. Once the team was selected the members spent many long hours reading and practicing.

Mrkaich said the social science section is the most difficult portion of the event. A sample question from that section of the event is "The dominant city in Mesopotamia during the fourth millennium BC was (select one), a. Nippur; b. Larsa; c. Uruk; d. Babylon; e. Agade." The correct answer is Uruk, a bit of trivia the students are expected to retain from the hours of practicing.

The Edison team travels to Los Angeles for the state finals in March and is hoping to qualify for the National Decathlon in Chicago April 13-16.
A special gift of Locks

More than two dozen female students from McLane High School volunteered to donate their hair to Locks to Love, a program that uses the tresses of volunteers to make wigs for cancer patients who have lost their own hair through chemotherapy treatment. Great Clips salon at Herndon and Ingram avenues clipped and styled the volunteers’ hair. Stylist Carolyn Harmon prepares to clip the hair of a junior. Although she was aghast when she saw her long tresses lopped off in a ponytail, she was a good sport because her hair was going to a great cause.

WorkAbility for special students

Bullard High School students with disabilities who are making the transition from school to work are receiving assistance through a program designed to empower them to access available resources.

“WorkAbility I” helps the students (ages 14-22) to complete their secondary education while simultaneously obtaining employability skills resulting in them becoming productive citizens.

Donna S. Martine, Fresno Unified’s Community Education Specialist, said the District has partnered with nearly 30 Fresno area businesses to provide real work situations for the student trainees.

She said the program was brought to Fresno Unified School District in 1986 to assist transition of high school students from the classroom to the work force.

“Since that time, hundreds of students have been placed in private business and over two-thirds of those students were hired,” she said. “All have received valuable work experience and developed the pre-employment, social and work skills needed to make informed career decisions.”

Businesses with an interest in participating in the WorkAbility 1 Program are urged to contact Martin at 457-3275 or Bullard High School at 451-4357.

Humanities

Continued from Page 12

literature adapted to standard curriculum.

It was initially funded by an NEH grant of $185,000 over 3 years. Today is its second year without funding, which has made technology a little more difficult to come by, but the teachers, still energized by the results of the cross-curriculum work, bring ideas and experiences to students that might be lost in the folds.

Continued from Page 1

McLane

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District maintenance staff busy during rainy season

Fresno Unified’s maintenance staff can be counted upon no matter what the emergency. The team recently filled numerous sandbags to fight back the water deposited by the storms that pounded the Central Valley. The maintenance staff has a big heart for the students they serve. During the holidays, they collect food baskets and deliver them to families in need.
On duty in Afghanistan

Isaac Harris, a former FUSD student, was home on leave from military duty for two weeks. We had a chance to talk to him before he returned to Afghanistan. He had much to say about support that flows to troops from the people at home. When asked about the magazines donated by Fresno Unified employees, Isaac replied “You can’t imagine how important it is to morale for soldiers to receive even the smallest care package from home.” We can expect that the magazine program was a hit with the soldiers. The background in the above photo has been purposely blurred at the request of commanders of U.S. forces to protect those in the photo.

District Response to the Williams vs. the State of California Lawsuit

Fresno Unified School District is committed to providing our students with well-maintained facilities and sufficient instructional materials to allow for all of our students to succeed. The District’s commitment dates to well before the class action lawsuit known as Williams vs. the State of California filed in May 2000 that alleged the State had failed to properly ensure students in all schools received access to “adequate education.”

The class action suit focused around claims that the State failed to provide thousands of public school students, particularly those in low income, diverse communities, with the minimum necessities required for an education, such as textbooks, trained teachers and safe and clean facilities. The case was settled in 2004. In the settlement, the State agreed to enact legislation that holds all school districts accountable to provide sufficient instructional materials, well-maintained schools and qualified teachers. Along with the requirements for low-performing schools, the State has promised nearly $1 billion to schools performing in the lowest deciles to address problems in facilities and instructional supplies. For Fresno Unified, we would receive additional funding for our decile 1, 2 & 3 schools.

Each Fresno Unified school site has Williams complaint forms for students, parents or staff to submit any concerns or complaints. Notification of the Williams case is posted in every classroom. The documents also are found of the District’s website at www.fresno.k12.ca.us.

Our plan of action to remedy the insufficiencies is to improve our tracking of lost, stolen and damaged books.

Centralized budgets will ensure that all students will have the needed materials to succeed in the academic areas. Departments will work cooperatively to closely monitor enrollment with materials orders.

Fresno Unified School District continues to work to provide a high quality program for all students.