



## **Newport-Mesa offers top-notch school programs**

By Jane Garland  
(Published: July 24, 2006)

What makes a school district go from good to great? Families, teachers, staff, administrators and a board of education dedicated to serving every child every day.

Besides offering a world-class education to all students, the Newport-Mesa Unified School District Board of Education has given hope to our youngest students, language acquisition to our newest students, alternative programs to our secondary students and advocates to our at-risk students.

School board members Dana Black, David Brooks, Tom Egan, Martha Fluor, Judy Franco, Linda Sneen and Serene Stokes work around the clock to provide students in Costa Mesa and Newport Beach the best that California and the United States have to offer.

The HOPE (Health, Opportunities, Preparation and Education) School Readiness Program, which is actively supported by the school board, ensures students greater success in their school years by investing in them before they reach kindergarten. The services of the HOPE Center include preschool and special education classes, access and referral to pediatric services, English and family literacy classes. The HOPE program is not only a model program in Orange County but recently won the coveted MAGNA Award from the National School Boards Assn. for a program that is the result of board involvement, successful in view of the program's primary objectives, important in promoting the district's mission and advancing student learning, capable of being replicated by other school boards and the result of collaboration between the school board and others. The HOPE School Readiness Program serves 598 preschool-age children and 100 infants and toddlers younger than 3 years of age. The program is directed by Lorie Hoggard.

The English Language Program directed by Karen Kendall reclassified 536 students during 2005-06; this represents a 43% increase from the previous year. The English Language Department is also nearing the goal of 100% of district teachers being authorized to teach English learners. The English Learner Program oversees the School Community Facilitators who work throughout the district to help families and students with resources and communication. The board of education was instrumental in developing the department of English learners and assuring all Newport-Mesa students have the skills to be proficient in the English language and that their families have the skills to provide needed resources for their future.

Under the direction of Fred Navarro, Newport-Mesa high schools have been undergoing redesign for the 21st century to make schools friendlier and more

accessible to families. The Board of Education is acutely aware that as times and technologies change, class offerings, venues and hours of operation must also change. The district will open Early College High School, a new alternative education campus, on Aug. 14. This new site was seeded with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and will eventually serve 400 students on the Back Bay/Monte Vista alternative education site. This new school -- conceived by Michael Murphy, student services director, and overseen by principal Kathy Slawson -- will combine secondary and college-level classes and award both a high school and associate in arts degree at graduation. High school redesign, another board driven initiative, also includes online classes, smaller learning communities and alternative class offerings.

Project ASK (Advocates Supporting Kids), a data-driven board initiative, provides research-focused programs to parents and students throughout the district. Programs being implemented by ASK include: Second Step, a preschool program that teaches social and emotional skills for violence prevention; Life Skills, a program designed to provide skills to resist peer pressures to smoke, drink and use drugs and help students develop greater self-esteem, self-mastery and self-confidence; Parenting Wisely, a program that builds parental confidence in parenting skills. Parenting Wisely seeks to improve communication, problem-solving and parent-school communication while improving school attendance and grades and reducing disciplinary infractions; and Parent Project, a program that teaches concrete prevention, identification and intervention strategies for the most destructive of adolescent behaviors: poor school attendance and performance, alcohol and other drug use, gangs, runaways and violence.

Prevention programs are a priority with the board of education because research shows that aggressive behavior in children predicts risk of later delinquency, substance abuse, school dropout, early parenthood and depression. Data gleaned through the ASK project will provide the staff and school board with significant information that will enhance their ability to respond to student and community priorities.

ASK is led by Jeff Gall, coordinator of student outreach advocates; Amparo Ames, coordinator of family outreach advocates; Diana Hensley, coordinator of preschool outreach advocates; and Pepe Montenegro and Tony Valenzuela, coordinators of crisis outreach advocates. ASK is part of the Department of Outreach and Advocacy Programs, of which I am the director.

The HOPE School Readiness Program, the English Language Program and the Department of Outreach and Advocacy are all housed at 220 23rd Street in Costa Mesa.

For more information on any of these board of education initiatives, please call (714) 424-5000 and ask for the appropriate director.

*\* JANE GARLAND is the director of Outreach and Advocacy Programs for the Newport-Mesa Unified School District.*