

# IUSD Today

News and Notes from around the Irvine Unified School District

Volume 2, Issue 1

September 2007

## Looking Ahead:

**Oct. 3:** IPSF sponsors Walk to School Day

**Oct. 9:** Board of Education meeting

**Oct. 16:** Woodbury Elementary hosts its Open House

**Oct. 23:** Board of Education meeting

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## New Year, New Faces

A handful of new principals has joined the IUSD team

**L**isa Livernois recognized it the minute she stepped onto the campus of Meadow Park Elementary:

There was just something different about this school, she thought. And there was something different about the entire Irvine Unified School District, for that matter.

“When you walk in the school doors, you immediately feel the sense of community,” said Livernois. “People are happy here; they’re comfortable.”

Livernois recently became Meadow Park’s newest principal, joining about a dozen administrators tapped this summer to lead IUSD’s elementary, middle and high school campuses.

Some are district veterans taking on new roles, such as former Eastshore Elementary



**Lisa Livernois, Meadow Park Elementary's new principal, chats with a few of her students during a recent lunch recess.**

Principal Erica Hoegh, who was selected to fill Pat Mulhaupt’s shoes at Westpark Elementary, and the popular Scott Bowman, who was promoted from assistant principal

*(Please see PRINCIPALS on page 5)*

## Let’s trade sedans for sneakers on Oct. 3

For many of our students, the family car has become the preferred way to get to school each day, and the reason is no mystery – driving is both quick and convenient.

But traveling by foot has its advantages. In addition to the health benefits, walking reduces traffic congestion, decreases auto emissions and gives families an extra few minutes together to chat and enjoy the scenery. There is even evidence that in-

creased physical activity leads to better be-



**Gwen Gross**  
Superintendent

havior and performance in the classroom.

For all of these reasons, the Irvine Public Schools Foundation will hold its first ever Walk to School Day on Wednesday, Oct. 3. All students and their families are encouraged to trade their sedans and SUVs for a comfortable pair of shoes, and to find ways to make walking a part of their everyday routines.

This worthwhile event coincides with International Walk to School Day, which annually promotes walking and bicycling around the globe as a means to advance health, improve air quality and establish safe routes to school for kids.

*(Please see WALK on page 6)*

## 'Rising star' promoted to Assistant Superintendent

The Irvine Unified School District has appointed Cassie Parham to serve as Assistant Superintendent of Education Services.

Parham, who was recently appointed Director of Secondary Education after serving as principal at Northwood High School for two years, succeeds Leah Laule, who retired Aug. 1. The appointment was officially approved by the Board of Education at its Sept. 18 meeting.

"Cassie has been a rising star in our district, a leader with a broad breadth of knowledge and a passion for educating students," Superintendent Gwen E. Gross said. "Though we had many outstanding applicants, Cassie's unique skill set and success with previous assignments made her the per-



**Cassie Parham, recently appointed Director of Secondary Education, is now Assistant Superintendent of Education Services**

fect match for this position."

A product of IUSD, Parham was a student at University Park and Santiago Hills elementary schools, Sierra Vista Middle School and

Irvine High School. She went on to pursue her bachelor's degree in literature from UC Santa Barbara and her master's degree in English from UC Irvine, where she also earned her teaching and administrative credentials.

Parham began her IUSD career as an English teacher, activities director and pep squad advisor at University High School and ultimately helped open Northwood High, where she worked for five years as an assistant principal and activities director. She continued her career at Irvine High as an assistant principal for a year before returning to Northwood as principal in 2005.

In May 2007, Parham was appointed Director of Secondary Education.

## Board votes to retain middle school configuration

The Irvine Unified School District has discontinued plans related to a 6-8 grade configuration at local middle schools, opting instead to retain the district's traditional K-6, 7-8 split.

On Aug. 28, IUSD's Board of Education voted unanimously to keep the current configuration in place, citing both enrollment shifts that no longer support adding a sixth-grade program to middle schools and the hefty cost of such a move.

At the same meeting, the Board thanked the parents, teachers and staff members who participated in the initiative.

In March of 2004, the School Configuration Committee brought to the Board a recommendation to change the grade configuration for new and existing middle schools in an effort to enhance math and science instruction.

In the years that followed, staff worked with teachers, parents and administrators to develop specific plans for a middle school transition, taking into account curriculum, staff-

ing, credentialing, special programs and facilities. Under a timetable approved by the Board, implementation was scheduled to begin at two campuses in 2008.

However, in order to review extensive data and to ensure diligent planning, it became necessary in early 2007 to hit the "pause" button on the 6-8 transition until an updated scope

***"The Board's decision charts the right path for our students and our district as a whole."***

***— Supt. Gwen Gross***

of information was gathered, particularly related to facilities. IUSD's Business and Facilities departments were directed to update the Facilities Master Plan, a comprehensive document spelling out all building and modernization needs, as well as anticipated sources of funding for upcoming construction projects.

Since then, it has been determined that transitioning to a 6-8 grade con-

figuration would exceed initial cost estimates. Moreover, staff has tracked a shift in enrollment that suggests IUSD's current middle schools will grow larger than originally projected, even without adding sixth grade.

"The Board's decision charts the right path for our students and our district as a whole," Superintendent Gwen Gross said. "Ultimately, we believe there are better ways to meet and exceed our curricular goals and to carry out our mission of providing the highest quality educational experience we can envision."

At the same time, Gross stressed that the research gathered over the past three years has been very valuable.

"This initiative has yielded insightful discussions about our curricular goals in the areas of math and science, and it is our intent to seize that momentum to review our current program in these areas at the middle school level," she said. "You will likely hear more about these efforts at future district meetings."

# Popular Mechanics

## A robotics course at Plaza Vista Middle School is inspiring tech-savvy kids

**T**hey're not quite ready to tackle household chores, but some robots at Plaza Vista Middle School are evolving with each new class.

And they're certainly inspiring their student creators, who can't wait to learn what else they can do.

Taught by Mary Chiaverini, a yearlong robotics elective is teaching tech-savvy eighth-graders the ins and outs of building a robot and programming it to perform simple – and not-so-simple – tasks.

Before the year is over, students will teach their machines to react to light, sound and the terrain around them. The third trimester will culminate with a mock-trip to Mars in Linda Brooks' classroom, where each mechanical creation will roam a rocky landscape made to look like the Red Planet.

So far, the class has taken to the challenge – with vigor. Chiaverini says a spirit of discovery has

*(Please see ROBOTICS on page 6)*



Brian Park, 14, programs his Lego robot with a classmate in Mrs. Chiaverini's robotics elective course at Plaza Vista Middle School. "This is the best class in the whole school," says Park.

## IUSD, City urge families to turn cans into cash

**I**rvine schools are getting the opportunity to help make their communities a little greener – and they'll be able to earn some green at the same time.

To kick-off districtwide recycling efforts, IUSD is partnering with the City of Irvine throughout the month of October in the Cans for Cash City Recycling Challenge.

The national aluminum can recycling competition is sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Novelis Corporation and Keep America Beautiful.

Families are encouraged to recycle their aluminum

cans through their local schools, and for each pound of cans collected, one dollar will go directly to those schools.

To make the task a little easier, blue collection bags will be made available to students and their parents throughout the month.

The City will be competing nationally this year against similarly-sized municipalities for up to \$10,000 in awards. If Irvine wins the challenge, city officials have pledged to pass the prize money on to the Irvine Public Schools Foundation.

IUSD is no stranger to recycling. During the last academic year, the district

recycled 150,000 pounds of paper, generating \$2,962.58 in revenue that went back to participating schools. This year, IUSD officials are aiming to collect one million pounds of recycled paper, aluminum cans, plastic and e-waste.

Meanwhile, community members can also help the City and IUSD win the 2007 Cans for Cash competition by recycling their aluminum cans through the City's existing curb-side recycling service or by dropping off cans at local redemption centers.

For more information about this year's competition, check out the City's website at [www.cityofirvine.org](http://www.cityofirvine.org).

**I'm more than just a Can**

**Cans for Cash**  
City Recycling Challenge  
October 1-31, 2007

## Scanning our District

# IUSD students continue to earn high marks

Students in the Irvine Unified School District continue to improve their performance on tests administered through the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, according to results released last month.

"While test scores are not the sole measure of achievement in the Irvine Unified School District, we are nevertheless quite pleased to see the percentages of students deemed proficient or advanced continue to rise," said IUSD Superintendent of Schools Gwen E. Gross. "Our staff, our parents and, most of all, our students should be extremely proud of these results."

The California Standards Tests (CSTs), which measure how well students in grades two through 11 know the state's rigorous content standards, are considered the cornerstone of the STAR program, which assessed approximately 4.8 million students in the spring of 2007. CST scores are divided into five levels of achievement: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic and far below basic.

In English/language arts, the rate of students deemed proficient or advanced varied by grade level from 62 percent of 11<sup>th</sup>-graders to 84 percent of fourth-graders. Countywide, 48 percent of 11-graders rated proficient or advanced in English/language arts, as did 58 percent of fourth-graders.

Comparing IUSD's English/language arts scores in 2007 to figures from the previous year, the largest gains were made in the second, sixth and ninth grades, which each jumped by 3 percentage points. The only decline, a 1 percentage point drop, was in the eighth grade. Overall, these changes were not considered statistically significant.

In math, grade-level CSTs were given to pupils in grades two through



Photo courtesy of Jeff Antenore, Irvine World News

**BACK TO SCHOOL: Principal Lauren Sipelis welcomes first- through third-graders at El Camino Real/Woodbury Elementary School, one of four year-round sites, on July 25.**

six. The percentage of students considered proficient or advanced ranged from 79 percent in the sixth grade to 85 percent in the second grade.

In grades seven through 11, end-of-course math exams in subjects such as algebra I, geometry and algebra II were given. When averaged together, scores again ranged.

The largest one-year gain was in the ninth grade, where the percentage of students in the proficient/advanced performance levels jumped 4 percentage points. The biggest decline was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, where scores dipped 2 percentage points. Again, these changes were not considered statistically significant.

Based on these scores and other criteria, 15 of 22 IUSD elementary schools and all five middle schools scored a 900 or better on the state's Academic Performance Index, which

measures achievement on a scale of 200 to 1,000.

All four comprehensive high schools had API scores above 800, considered an ideal target for the state's public schools.

## Bren Foundation to give second \$2M installment

In 2006, the Donald Bren Foundation pledged to give IUSD \$20 million over 10 years for enriched curriculum in art, science and music. The second annual installment of \$2 million is scheduled to be presented at a Board of Education meeting in October.

Meanwhile, Irvine Unified is working on a report detailing not only how the money is being spent but what impact this donation has had on fourth-through-sixth-grade classrooms. The district has hired a consultant from USC to offer a third-party evaluation and to set measurable objectives going forward.

## IUSD continues to examine heat and hydration policies

Following a recent tragedy at a neighboring high school, IUSD continues to examine policies related to heat and hydration on the athletic fields.

Assistant Superintendent Cassie Parham recently told the Board of Education that IUSD has solicited the practices in place from its high schools and determined that all comply with the Inter-Association Task Force Considerations for Risk Reduction.

Enforcing water breaks, allowing football players to remove their helmets when they're not participating in drills and compensating for high temperatures by modifying the length of practice and the equipment used are just a few examples of how IUSD is working to keep student-athletes safe.

## PRINCIPALS: Five new faces you'll see in IUSD

(Continued from page 1)

to principal at Rancho San Joaquin Middle School.

Others, including Livernois, are new to the district, bringing with them a wide range of unique backgrounds and expertise. Here's a brief look at some of the new faces you might see around IUSD this year:

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**L**ivernois was most recently an assistant principal at Patton Elementary School in Garden Grove.

Prior to that, she served as a teacher in grades three, four, five and six; a district program facilitator; and a supervisor in the School Readiness and Community-based Outreach Program.

Now she's at Meadow Park, and she's fitting right in with her new community.

"It's a place where people are focused on making sure that children are supported, respected and listened to," Livernois said. "I have received a tremendous amount of support, both from the school and from the district."

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**S**usan Kemp arrived at Canyon View Elementary from the Ocean View School District in Huntington Beach, where she served as principal at Hope View and College View elementary schools.

Prior to her administrative assignments,



Livernois



Kemp

Kemp taught for eight years in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District. She has also been instrumental in the staff development arena with a wide range of experiences in special education, writing, early literacy and English language instruction for students.

"I love it," she said of Canyon View. "It's an amazing community with gifted teachers and just wonderful, wonderful students."

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**L**ynn Matassarini is the new principal at Sierra Vista Middle School.

Matassarini began her career in the Mesa Public School District in Arizona, where she taught physical education for 11 years. She served as an assistant principal at both the elementary and middle school levels before being named principal of John J. Rhodes Junior High School, a 1,300-student junior high in Mesa, in 1994.

Relocating to Southern California in 2000, Matassarini came to IUSD from Orange Unified, where she most recently served as principal of Lampson Elementary School.

A resident of Irvine, where her children attend school, Matassarini said she's thrilled to finally work for IUSD.

"It's been a terrific opening," she said. "We have a wonderful PTSA and so many volunteers. I've never seen a school like it."

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**M**ichael Shackelford came to Stone Creek Elementary School from the Tustin Unified School District.

He has more than 12 years of experience in education, serving as an elementary teacher, a special programs coordinator and an elementary school principal. He has also been a resident faculty member at Concordia University since 1999 in the Education and Theatre departments.

"I'm very pleased to be a member of the Irvine community," said Shackelford, who has a master's degree in Early Childhood Curriculum Development and Instruction from Concordia and is currently working to complete a doctorate in Academic Leadership.

"The community, the teachers and the kids have been great, and I'm so pleased."

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**W**ith more than 15 years of experience in education, Stuart Payne came to Northwood Elementary School from the Orange Unified School District.

He was a teacher and an assistant principal at an elementary school before serving for the past six years as the assistant principal at a high-performing middle school.

Payne received his master's degree in K-12 Administration from Pepperdine University and his doctorate in School Leadership from USC.

"We have an extremely talented pool of teachers (at Northwood)," he said. "I'm finding them to be a very cohesive group and they're very child-centered in their goals."



Shackelford



Matassarini



Payne



...providing the highest quality educational experience we can envision.

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### Got a story?

Have an idea for an *IUSD Today* story or a submission? Contact Public Information Officer Ian Hanigan at [ihanigan@iusd.org](mailto:ihanigan@iusd.org) or call (949) 936-5002.

Be sure to learn about the Irvine Public Schools Foundation at [www.ipsf.net](http://www.ipsf.net)

## The Irvine Unified School District

# WALK: IPSF seeks to promote wellness

*(Continued from page 1)*

In Irvine, a kick-off ceremony will be held at 7:15 a.m. at Northwood Community Park. Irvine City Councilman Suhkee Kang, the honorary chair of this inaugural event, will headline an impressive roster of school officials, local dignitaries and business leaders who plan to join our students as they walk to area schools.

IPSF has teamed up with PTA representatives, the City of Irvine, the Irvine Chamber of Commerce, the Irvine Police Department,

the Orange County Fire Authority and local civic and corporate organizations to create safe routes to school and to provide support for students on Oct. 3.

On this day, the foundation also plans to kick off its annual fundraising campaign, and what a perfect tie-in. As you know, IPSF supports nurses, health clerks, The Great Body Shop curriculum and many other wellness components in and around IUSD classrooms.

Said Tim Shaw, IPSF's chief executive officer, "There

is encouraging research that shows walking to school is associated with higher overall physical activity throughout the school day. Holding a Walk to School Day event can be a great catalyst to getting kids up and active."

Not to mention that the City of Irvine was designed for walking, with its scenic pathways and schools at the center of tree-lined villages.

So, this year, let's all look for ways to support healthy activities in our communities. And let's take the first step by walking to school on Oct. 3.

# ROBOTICS: Toshiba funds innovative class

*(Continued from page 3)*

gripped her students, who are eager to move on to each new step.

"They want to do this during their free time," she said. "It's like they can't wait to build it; they can't wait to program it."

The idea came to Chiaverini about two years ago, but it wasn't until last summer that she went out and purchased her own Lego Mindstorm NXT robotics kit.

"Lo and behold, I was so intrigued by it," she said.

After pitching the idea to Principal Stan Machesky and Brooks, the science department chair, Chiaverini ordered a class set of kits over



Students in Mrs. Chiaverini's robotics course at Plaza Vista Middle School are programming Lego Mindstorm NXT robots, like the one pictured above, to explore a Mars-like surface.

the Internet. Meanwhile, Brooks applied for grant funding from Toshiba, which had fueled classroom innovations in the past. The company came through once again, providing \$4,500.

Eighth-grader Brian Park is now among those who are benefiting from that investment. He said he took the course to challenge himself. Now, he's challenging his mechanical creation to respond to

its environment.

"This class is the best class in the whole school. Period," said Park, 14.

Matthew Urrutia, 13, said he'd always been fond of watching robotics programs on Discovery's Science channel.

"It's more exciting now that I can do those things myself," he said.

That excitement is certainly evident to outside observers. Chiaverini's students don't need much prompting when they come through the door; they simply grab their robots and get to work.

"Of all the classes I've ever taught," Chiaverini said, "I've never seen them so intrigued."