



The Pink Panther

Henry J. Kaiser, Jr. Elementary School

25 South Hill Court, Oakland, California 94618 (510) 879-1710

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 15, 2006

Dear Kaiser Families,

As you know last Thursday was the date of the Enrollment Options Fair for the school district. Several parent volunteers helped me staff the station at the fair, and represented Kaiser School very well.

I found myself repeating a lot of information to let interested parents know about our school, our curriculum, parent involvement, and their chances of getting in. As the day went on and my feet grew tired I refined my message to the public. I told people, "Kaiser is the best school in the world because of the parent involvement!" I said things like, "Our school works so well even for struggling students, because parents have chosen to be here and therefore have a level of commitment to the school."

Prospective parents told me that as they researched schools, Kaiser was a shining star. I know I feel lucky to have worked here for over 20 years, and to have sent my own sons here to Kaiser School. We have a staff that cares passionately about what they do; working at Kaiser school is not merely a job, it is a vocation. And I know that you all work very hard to help your child succeed and to make our school a success.

These then, are the pillars of our success: parental choice, parental involvement in the school, close student monitoring, and a caring and intelligent faculty. I know that you will join me in supporting all of these components of our successful school.

Our support begins even before enrollment,

with the selection process that brings new students to Kaiser as well as the one that sends Kaiser grads to the next schools of their choice. Please see Page 4 inside for more on how you can help with this effort.



**The Walk-A-Thon
is Coming!**

Finally I'd like to offer you a little story reflecting the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. I was a seventh grade teacher here some years ago, and one day one of my students challenged my understanding of the race relations between my students. She said to me, "Mr. Stenger, I don't think you understand. I think that you think everybody at Kaiser school gets along like they're best friends or something."

"It's just at school we play together on the playground, and we work together in classrooms. It's only here where we sit together in the cafeteria and eat our lunch with our friends. We don't hang out together all the time, especially in our own neighborhoods."

I looked at the young lady, dumbfounded for a moment, stunned by witnessing one of my students profoundly yet matter-of-factly describing her school life in terms that many other people dream of.

I could only respond, "Karol, if all the world live that way, what a wonderful world it would be!"

Let's continue to live the dream!

Mel Stenger, Principal

Getting In The Know

Some Timely Announcements

LEGO ENGINEERING STILL HAS SPACE AND IS NOW **OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS GRADES 1-5!**

LEGO ENGINEERING meets in the library on Thursday afternoons from 3:00-4:30 now through March 22nd. This has been a popular class in the past, but if we can't meet minimum enrollment, they won't be able to offer the class at Kaiser in the future. If your child is interested in participating in this fun and educational class, please stop by the office to pick up an enrollment form and sign your child up NOW!!

DON'T FORGET TB TESTING JAN 24th!

TB tests are required for all regular volunteers at Kaiser School. Bring \$10 and visit our school nurse to have your test done. Contact Robin in the office to be put on the list.

Walk A Thon Kick Off Meeting!

Come meet to discuss how you can help make the Walk A Thon a huge success!

Meet at Crogan's in Montclair at 7pm on Wednesday January 31st

Please let me know if you can make it, and if you need directions.

Lisa Cartolano 510.213.1139 or lisa.cartolano@prurealty.com

How to be in the *Pink Panther*

To include your story or information in your school newsletter:

forward your news, questions or article to the editors by 5:00 p.m. on Sundays via:

mryder@ix.netcom.com and kbradley@ix.netcom.com

KAISER CALENDAR

DATE / DAY	EVENT
Jan 17	SSC Meeting, 4 PM
Jan 20	Beautification Day, 9 AM
Jan 24	TB Tests – required for Kaiser Volunteers
Jan 26	Asian New Year Potluck
Jan 26	Semester End Retention Agreements
Jan 31	Walk-A-Thon Meeting @ Crogan's

If you have any siblings intending to come to school here at Kaiser in the fall:

See the information on Page 4 inside!

The Kaiser School Web Site

<http://www.kaiserelementary.org>

- Info about fundraising events
- After school programs
- **Teacher classrooms online**

How to Reach Kaiser School

Our phone number is **(510) 879-1710** (includes a 24 hour message service).

To participate in the school community group, go to (and join) this website:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kaiserelementaryschool_group/

Healthy Lifestyles... Healthy Children

In case you couldn't make it to last Wednesday's PTA meeting, here are some interesting facts that you missed about "healthy living," presented by Nora Cody, the Wellness Coordinator for the Oakland Unified School District:

- Sixty-five percent of the American population is now overweight and 30% is obese. Being overweight greatly increases one's risk for developing serious diseases such as diabetes and heart disease and increases the likelihood of developing ailments such as joint pain.
- Because of the increase in childhood obesity, more and more kids are developing Type 2 diabetes. In fact, it is believed that kids born today will be the first generation to have a shorter lifespan than that of their parents!
- Being overweight takes 10 years off one's life and 20 years off one's quality of life.
- The rise in obesity in our country – which started in the 1980s -- mirrors the rise in low fat foods being offered by food companies. We started focusing only on fat content and stopped counting calories and considering sugar content and other nutritional facts.

If you are interested in improving your family's eating habits, a good first step is to get your child involved in the food selection process. Start reading nutrition labels together:

- First check for sodium content – too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure in some people and you will be surprised to find it in products that you didn't expect to have much salt. The FDA has lowered the daily requirement for sodium intake from 3000 mg a day to 2400 mg per day.
- Next look at sugar content. There is no "dietary sugar requirement" as there is for other nutrients because you get enough sugar eating healthy foods such as fruit. Therefore, it is best to keep additional sugar intake to a minimum.
- Also, look for products that are made of whole grain or whole wheat – which take longer for the body to process and do not spike your body's sugar level as would a product made simply of "wheat."

Armed with this information, you can set parameters for your kids – for example tell them that they can buy any cereal that they want as long as it has less than 4 grams of sugar (4grams equals 1 teaspoon of sugar), a certain amount of salt, and is made with whole grains. Once your child feels more empowered to make decisions about his eating habits, he will be more likely to make healthy choices.

We've been inspired by Nora Cody's presentation and will continue to update you with more tips and information in the Pink. **Next week look for the "Top 10 tips for Dealing with Picky Eaters."**

Kaiser Kiosk

On the topic of the Enrollment Options Fair, I'd like to remind all of you who have fifth graders that this is the time for you to be choosing a middle school. We had a meeting back in early December with representatives from several the middle schools to try to give you information to help your choices.

Now is the time to visit the two or three schools that you are really interested in. After making your decision, please bring your completed application to our office and we will send it downtown. There is no advantage in turning your form in early; they will not be processed until after January 29.

Please take some time to involve your fifth grader in your decision-making process. I am not suggesting that you let your fifth-grader make the decision, but to involve them in the process will increase the likelihood that they will eventually go along with the choice you make for middle school.

Oakland Public Schools offers several good choices for middle schools; they are all slightly different and so it takes time to find the one that will fit your family the best.

- Mel Stenger

EXTRA! This is the time that we are offering visits for prospective kindergarten families. We are welcoming visitors through the end of January.

If you know of any family who has a four-year-old who will be ready for kindergarten next fall, please let them know about Kaiser school. They should call the office to make an appointment for a visit if they are interested in attending Kaiser elementary in the fall. Even if they think they don't need to visit, they should; seeing the school in action is very different than reading our paperwork or hearing about us by word of mouth.

Here are the children's programs for February at Dimond Branch Library 3565 Fruitvale Ave.:

Friday, Feb. 2
Dimond Children's Book Club
Reading The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman.
Refreshments provided.
ages 9 - 12
4:00 - 5:00 pm

Tuesday, Feb. 6,
James Henry, drummer
Celebrate African American History Month with this interactive family program.
all ages
7:00 pm

Friday, Feb. 16
Dimond Teen Book Club
Reading Money Hungry by Sharon Flake.
Refreshments provided.
4:00 - 5:00 pm

Friday, Feb. 23
Snowflakes in February
Crafts with Robin Goodfellow
ages 6 and older
3:30 - 5:00

Every Tuesday, except Feb. 6
Family Storytime
Join us for stories, songs, and fingerplays
ages 0 - 6 and family
7:00 pm

Every Wednesday
Toddler Time
Join us for stories, songs, and fingerplays
ages 0-2
10:15 am

Every Wednesday
Preschool Storytime
Join us for stories, songs, and fingerplays
ages 3- 5

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Teacher Q&A

*Long-term Kaiser teachers like **Tom Rust** bring incredible perspective to our challenges and opportunity today. The Pink had a visit with Tom about how teachers shape things up...*

Q. Being at Kaiser means looking for ways to make well-rounded students. What are your keys to success for that?

A. I love teaching at Kaiser School! Kaiser School is special in so many ways- all of which add to its ability to help create well-rounded students. Kaiser School is a welcoming place to a wide variety of populations. Being in class with children from different neighborhoods, different racial backgrounds, different family structures, different income levels, etc helps to make Kaiser students ready for the world. In addition, the students, parents and staff at Kaiser are a close-knit group. Each adult takes the responsibility of looking after all of the students - not just their own class. I believe that at Kaiser School we really do embrace the idea that it takes a village.

Q. After a typical year for you, when the kids are 10% older than they started out, what do you think has changed about how the kids relate to each other?

A. I have a very different perspective on this since I spent 20 years of my teaching profession in grades 4, 5, and 6 before moving to 2nd. I loved the upper grades and creating curriculum that connected the lives of the students to the state standards for those grade levels. However, I found myself becoming bored after a couple of years. So I would either move to a new school or a new grade level to keep myself motivated. This all changed for me when I made the big move to 2nd grade five years ago. Second graders are very different at the end of the year than the youngsters they were that first day of school. I am finding that since 2nd graders change so much during the course of the school year I am not becoming bored with either them or the curriculum. (Out of 26 years of teaching this is the longest I have stayed in one position.) Second graders start out writing a few complete sentences. By December all of them are writing well-developed paragraphs with topic sentences. By the end of the year they are writing mini-reports and three to five paragraph essays. That kind of growth is remarkable.

When it comes to watching how children relate to each other over the course of the year, I now believe that I have a profound influence. In the past, I have told parents that I don't change behavior; I merely suppress it for a year. However, numerous parents have come back to me over the years and related stories of sustained personal growth for their child. This is the best kind of news a teacher can receive. I believe that coupled with teaching children how to relate to each other, they must build a sense of who they are. Sometimes this can include taking a personal inventory of both their strengths and weaknesses in relating to others. Those strengths must then be built upon and those weaknesses must be dealt with.

Q. Here's a big question: we heard on NPR the other day that in the near future, English and community college will be the two most critical issues in California education, because California must grow and keep its own talent. Do you think this means anything special about preparing pre-teen kids?

A. I think that the preparation of children includes these and a myriad of other issues - much of which comes back to the idea of educating the whole child to create well-rounded students. I believe that the state of education has more to say about these two particular issues through English as a Second Language and higher education opportunities. I do think that that we as teachers need to move our focus from college to life long learning. It used to be disgraceful to attend a community college, but today it is a great place to start out for 2-3 years. Students can get their basic requirements accomplished, save a ton of money in tuition, and take some extra time to make some career decisions. *[more next page...]*

Teacher Q&A cont'd.

Q. Who are a couple of your personal heroes?

A. My personal heroes are just that- personal. They are everyday, regular people who have made a profound difference in my life.

The first is my ballet teacher, Mary John Abbott. She is a southern spitfire who always encouraged me to "Make it Wonderful". She taught me confidence. She taught me how to go on stage and project to the balcony. She helped me to find my voice and a sense of joy that had been lacking in my life. She shared with me a big world that was outside of Lincoln, Nebraska. I credit Mary John for making me the confident, outgoing person that I am today.

I was miserable in high school. I had two fabulous high school teachers who noticed and took me under their wings. They kept me sane and alive. They taught me that being different was a gift and that I was a valuable human being.

Finally, I had a number of influential mentors when I first started teaching in Oakland -- my principal at Markham, Laverda Henderson, and the area superintendent, Vera Ray. Both of these women saw my talents in the classroom and my ability to interact positively with others. They encouraged me to become a mentor teacher. Early in my teaching career they made me realize the positive impacts that I could make beyond the classroom to the larger community.

Q. Outside of school, kids get easy exposure to adult achievement probably through marketing more than news or involvement. But, setting aside celebrity hype, who do you think kids could really look up to today?

A. I think that students should find role models the same place that I did- in my own backyard. Role models should be real people living the same real lives as ourselves. These role models need to be pointed out to students and held up as an example. The parent who works overtime to make for a better life for their families. The neighbor who volunteers every week at the homeless shelter helping others. The teacher who goes out of their way to show a personal interest in the development of a child. I also believe that students need role models who look like them reflecting their own background.

Q. What's the top thing that brought you to teaching when you began?

A. This question has multiple layers. It sounds corny, but all I ever wanted to do was teach. 1) In high school I did a lot of volunteer work through the local Parks and Recreation Department with special needs children and young adults. I originally had planned to be a special education teacher, but would have needed to stay in college for an additional year and could not afford that. So, I became a regular classroom teacher. 2) I wanted to get out of the midwest and move to a large city. I knew that teaching was a skill that I could take with me anywhere. 3) Being gay, I grew up feeling very isolated and confused. I had horrible education experiences with verbal abuse and bullying from other students. I wanted to be in a position where I could influence those same experiences for others, for the better. I want to stop bullying before it occurs. I want children to feel safe and loved. I want to help make the world a better place for future generations. What better place to achieve all of this than in the classroom.