**Archives: VTA President Speeches to the VUSD Board**

February 16, 2012

Good Evening Board Members, Dr. Bales and the members of the audience. Thank you for voting for the early retirement incentive. It will help many of our veteran teachers retire and hopefully we need to send out pink slips in March.

 In December, I was made aware of a full page ad in the San Diego Union Tribune by Board members and District personnel. This ad was paid for by a non-profit group called the California Endowment. The Endowment’s mission and goal is to support health care for children in schools and their neighborhoods. The California Teachers Association is in partnership with the Endowment to promote Health Happens in Schools. But CTA did not pay for or write the ad that was in the paper.

When I became aware of the ad I immediately contacted CTA leadership and informed them that the ad was misrepresenting VUSD graduation rates and that we were unhappy with the tone of the ad. In January, I met with both the President and Vice-President of CTA to discuss the content of the ad. Both of them understood my concerns with the inaccurate information and my displeasure with the tone of the advertisement. They followed up by contacting the California Endowment leadership and explaining the situation. On January 27th, I along with Dr. Bales received a letter of apology from the Endowment and since the ad was so public I would like to take the time now to read the letter for the record.

Thank you for allowing me to read the letter.

Next I would like to share with you some of what I have been hearing from teachers at our school sites. I have visited approximately 20 schools in the last six weeks and one concern I am hearing over and over is the amount of time teachers are asked to be out of their classrooms. They are requested to get subs for mock Learning walks and then again for District learning walks and then there are trainings they must attend. Some teachers have told me they have been out for 10 days already this school year. I shared my concerns with the Executive team and now I wanted to share them with the Board. Since we are a PI District I believe it is important that we limit the time the professional educator is out of the classroom. We have many good subs, some okay subs but none are as good as the classroom teacher who knows his or her students and the curriculum.

Last, I would like to invite all the Board members to join me on March 2, Read Across America Day, in visiting school sites and reading to our students. I will be joining the Rotary Club that Dr. Lilly and Dr. Bales and I are all members of at Olive Elementary School. On Thursday, March 1st we will be at Grapevine Elementary and each first grader at both schools will receive a brand new Dr. Suess book. Thank you

October 20 , 2011

Good Evening Dr. Bales and Board Members,

It is almost Halloween and time for students to go trick or treating. The school year is flying by and time with it. There is so much curriculum that teachers need to cover with their students and then the benchmark tests are being given these past few weeks. There have been a few bumps along the way this time of year and hopefully we can work together to solve the problems.

 It is sometimes difficult at elementary schools to have enough staff to cover all of the prep time for teachers. It is important for the teachers to have this time for lesson planning, calling parents, meeting with counselors or specialist such as speech pathologist and also to make copies for class. I hope to work with the site administrators and District personnel to solve this problem.

This Saturday is the VUSD Art Festival and we hope everyone can come out, spend the day and see all of the amazing art work our students are creating. You will also get to enjoy the performing arts; band, choir and dance as the students demonstrate their skills. It is a time to enjoy family and friends and honor our students, we are so proud of them all.

There is an agenda item in tonight’s Board packet that I have struggled with on how I should deal with the content and the action it is requesting. On the one hand, I thought ignore and it gives it less credibility but on the other hand it is inflammatory and slanderous and it should be confronted. So I have decided to address the Board with my concerns and let you know my feelings as the President of the Vista Teachers Association.

 The item I am referring to is Board item 21 B submitted by a member of the public. This community member states that and I quote; “Since the Vista Teachers Association (VTA) takeover of Vista Unified School District in 1994 the VTA has been given elite status.” End quote. This is a complete and utterly untrue statement and is disparaging on the members of the Board and the Teachers Association. There is no basis in fact to support this comment and the Association takes offense at the implications of the statement. In the years since 1994 the VTA members have had five years in a row of no raises, an increase in class sizes; a declaration of impasse imposed by the District over contract negotiations and increased out of pocket expenses for health benefits. I believe that the facts and the facts alone bear witness to the fact that the VTA does not in fact have elite status in this District and nor do we control the Board. There have been no fewer than five grievances filed to arbitration and a lawsuit against the Association.

If the only benefit that we are given is to have additional time to speak at Board meetings so that Board members can hear our side of issues in the District to try to find solutions instead of filing grievances then I think it is a small price to pay. Our members live and work in Vista and are part of the community and the President as the spokesperson of the Association has the obligation to let the Board know about our concerns and issues. Our teachers too are taxpayers and voters but beyond that we have a vested interest in seeing this District succeed and all children receive an education that helps them become contributing members of society. I have never personally been responsible for dragging Board meetings into late in the evening by my speeches. I ask the Board to please reject this erroneous and mean spirited attack on the Teachers of this District.

Thank you,

Barbara Franklin

September 8, 2011

Good Evening Board members

The last two weeks have been a little hectic with the shortened week and the blackout but we have also had some exciting work going on at the sites. Back to school nights have been scheduled and have taken place at many sites or some are re-scheduled for tonight. Our enrollment across the District is over projections, which is good news.

This time of year we also have the Williams Act compliance visits. Each year it is a struggle to make sure every school has a credentialed teacher in each class, and books for each student for every curricular area. We have had some disruptions in classrooms with the movement of teachers to other school sites. It is very hard, especially for our youngest students to suddenly have a new teacher three weeks into the school year.

I have talked to Myrna and Jeanie about these issues and I hope in the future we can try harder to have fewer of these disruptions. We would like to set up a committee comprised of parents, teachers, principals and district personnel to study and reflect on what worked and what we need to improve for next year. It is always a good idea to reflect back on procedures and practices and make sure we are doing what is best for students.

The beginning of the school year is a time to learn routines, tasks and procedures. When a class has an insufficient amount of materials for every student it makes the learning more difficult. Then you have a classroom of students learning all of these skills with their new teacher and the very next day she or he is gone! I don’t know about most of you but I personally like to know that certain things, like teachers, remain the same. We need to be very careful to limit these disruptions and make sure it is the last alternative chosen. I talked about similar issues last year at this time and while we are still having some problems it is better than last year but I believe we can and should do better. The formation of this committee is one way to ensure that we are thoughtful and do better for our students next year.

I want to share with you part of an email I received from an elementary teacher yesterday.

“Virtually every teacher here is working 20+ extra hours per week, unpaid. Even at that, they live in fear of bad evaluations for "not getting the job done." The Houghton Mifflin ELA program is completely inappropriate for the amount of time we have to teach it. We get 45 minutes for the 90 minute reading lessons, 15 minutes for the 30 minute word works lesson, and 20 minutes for the 30 minute writer's workshop. Also during that time we are supposed to give individual help, differentiate instruction, and squeeze in 30 minutes of Universal Access time. Some of this is supposed to happen during 45 minutes of the hour from recess to lunch called ELD time, but no matter how you stack it, it adds up to considerably more time required than we have. Then add individual testing, etc. Even our literacy coach admits that it is simply not possible, so try to drop all the "right" balls. Science and Social Studies share 2 hours per week and we are shorting Math and PE minutes and hoping to get away with it.

This is just not right. Moral is at an all time low. The "prep time" before and after school is nearly completely used up by duties and meetings. The additional time during PE (1 hour per week) and during library/computer lab time (1 hour each 2 weeks) is really about all you get to prep multiple subjects, contact parents, etc. Ludicrous!

If you ask many of the teachers they will say they have to do it for the kids.”

I wanted to share this email with you because I want you to understand how hard our teachers are working and the conditions and stress we are placing them and our students in. We are a PI District, we all know that and we are all working hard trying to help our students learn and be successful but sometimes we have to ask, “AT WHAT COST!”? There is little or no time for art, music, drama, history, science and even PE. I had several teachers tell me that their Principal told them to skip PE twice a week to have more time for ELD and Math. In elementary schools, PE is a state mandated program, in other words this Principal was asking the teachers to break the law and lie about their PE time. Now, I am not saying the Principal was malicious about it but anxious and scared about how to get students to proficient or advanced.

I am sharing these concerns with you because you, the School Board, are ultimately responsible for the education of our students, as elected officials it is your duty to make sure that our students, schools and teachers have the necessary time, materials and staffing needed to be successful. Sometimes you are unaware of what is going on at all 30 school sites and each has distinct challenges and needs. But when I hear over and over from teachers at sites throughout the District the same challenges and problems it is my duty to inform you and work with the administration to alleviate some of the hardships. I ask for your leadership and help with these problems in our schools.

Thank you.

August 18, 2011

Good Evening Dr. Bales and Board Members,

I always love the beginning of a new school year. A fresh start, new students, newly decorated rooms and new supplies. Sometimes we have new colleagues and maybe even a new school site. It is a time of hope and happiness. We are lucky this school year to begin with all of our pink slipped teachers back and many of our temporary teachers have also returned. The beginning of the school year so far has gone smoothly, not too many calls yet.

I am glad that we are returning four more days to the instructional calendar and one more staff development day in January for our teachers. A chance to collaborate is an important part of our profession and I am glad we were able to prevail.

I have also had the privilege of meeting one of our new principals and am looking forward to meeting the rest in the next few weeks. I have sat down and met with Jeanie, Myrna, Donna and Peggy and I am happy to say we are working on problem solving together and heading off problems before they become grievances. VTA is hopeful that this year the District and Association can work together to put the needs of students first while respecting the rights of the employee groups. We are able to accomplish more when we work together to solve problems.

 I also have walked on the campus of Olive and Washington and I want to commend Donna Caperton and Steve Pressly and their staffs for the amazing job they have done in such a short timeframe. The campus looks warm and inviting and the classrooms well done. I know there are a few kinks to work out with the schedules and getting everyone used to the parking and navigating around the two schedules but those are minor issues to resolve.

There are exciting issues in education and our District happening now. New national common core standards are being developed and our District is already looking at ways to implement them with the strong Language Arts and math programs we already have in place. Also, the redistricting for School Board elections will be voted on in the upcoming months and it is a chance to change the face of the District and make us more accountable to the community we serve. I look forward to the discussions that will take place over these two issues.

Lastly, I would like to take this time to thank all of our CSEA employees who worked hard over the summer preparing our rooms and campuses for our students. We often forget to thank people we work with every day who make our job easier. The office staff that fills our store orders, delivers our student rosters, help us find a missing box of supplies. We also have great staffs who prepare the cafeteria and we can’t forget the gardeners, the bus drivers or the maintenance crews. It really does take a village to educate and work with our students. Thank you and let’s have an amazing school year.

Thank you.

April 21, 2011

Good Evening

The District and VTA were present for a hearing on Tuesday to go over the seniority list for the pink slipped teachers. This was a very stressful day for our teachers who have been rif’ed. There are still 78 teachers that may be permanently pink slipped on May 13th the deadline for final notices. It is a direct result of the State budget and the inability of our State legislature to extend the taxes that we are already paying.

The Education Coalition which includes the California Teachers Association, Classified Employees(CSEA), the School Board Association and the School Administrators organization, to name a few, are working together to try to convince the Governor and the legislature to pass the budget and extend the taxes needed to support public education.

I urge each member of the Board to write letters, make phone calls and contact your legislators and urge them to support the tax extensions. As Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. said, “Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.” One feature of a civilized society is a free public education and taxes are the means by which our society pays for education. A free public education allows each member of society a chance to better their life. It is what each parent wants for their child. We cannot deny our children the chance at a better life, which is what happens when we reduce or eliminate all that is good about public education.

I have passed out in this room a flyer about a planned rally on May 13th at the Embarcadero in San Diego from 4-6 PM. VTA will be furnishing busses for anyone who would like to attend the rally. If you are interested please come to the VTA table at the break or talk to me after the meeting to sign up for a spot on the bus.

It is important that we work together to extend taxes and prevent the further cuts to education that would happen without them. If the taxes are not extended we could lose class size reduction in grades first, second and third. Class sizes could increase to 32 students in each class. These larger class sizes hinder the ability of students to learn to read.

So often in this District it feels like we are odds but with this budget crisis we must join together and pressure our elected officials to protect public education. This is not an administrator issue, Board issue or a Union issue but a societal issue. We must show that we value public education. Vista cannot afford to lose 136 hardworking, dedicated teachers. Our students need them in the classrooms and not in the unemployment lines.

Tonight we are proclaiming that May 11th is the day of the teacher and school nurses day and the week of May 15-21 Classified School Employees week so let’s use these days to honor these employees by raising our voices as one and let Sacramento know that we want them to protect public education.

Thank you.

March 10, 2011

Good Evening,

As happens every year at this time lately, we are learning that 57 teachers will be pink slipped on March 15th. It is a direct result of the State budget and planning for the worst but hoping for the best. It is so sad though that every year bright, talented, dedicated teachers are put through this process. It is stressful for their families and causes panic about their chosen career. I am afraid that we will lose many of these amazing teachers because they will finally have enough of the stress and leave the profession.

I know as we enter this time of year it seems inevitable that we will have to pink slip teachers but I hope this will spur on our parents, the community, teachers and the school board to pressure the state legislature to allow the special election in June to occur. I also hope we can convince the voters to come out and vote in support of the tax extensions. If these extensions do not pass our District and other Districts throughout the State will have to deal with the loss of millions of dollars from our budgets. I urge each member of the Board to write letters, make phone calls and contact your legislators and urge them to support the governor’s proposal.

As the budget is on all of our minds now and we struggle with how do we balance the budget and still have exceptional educational experiences for our students? We know that the teacher in the classroom is the first contact for education for our students, then we have the support professionals, office staff, principals and it continues on. We need to make our priorities the closest to the classroom, the cuts need to be away from the students’ direct instruction as much as possible. I know the budget committee met this week and I am sure it is a struggle to find ways to cut more when we have cut so much over the last five years. I would like to bring some information to the Board that I just became aware of and it seems excessive to me. I have learned, by looking at contracts and fee statements, that VUSD has spent $1,794,588.07 on legal fees alone in the last three years. I have asked around other Districts and was told that their fees are less then one million for the same time frame. I was shocked and appalled that we spent so much on legal fees in a three year period. I hope you are also shocked and can look at ways to reduce this one example of excessive costs not directly benefitting students.

One other item I would like to discuss with you this evening is the focus on testing and how it is hurting public education. I just finished this book by Diane Ravitch called “The Death and Life of the Great American School System.” I would ask that each of you read this book and seriously consider how the education of our students is being harmed because of the unreasonable mandates of NCLB. Diane Ravitch is a well respected research professor at New York University and she was the former Assistant Secretary of Education. Her credentials are impeccable.

I want to read you a quote from the last chapter in her book. This quote sums up my feelings about public education also. “As a nation, we need a strong and vibrant public education system. As we seek to reform our schools, we must take care to do no harm. In fact, we must take care to make our public schools once again the pride of our nation. …At the present time, public education is in peril. Efforts to reform public education are, ironically, diminishing its quality and endangering its very survival. We must turn our attention to improving the schools, infusing them with the substance of genuine learning and reviving the conditions that make learning possible.”

Ms. Ravitch does not say that we should eliminate standardized tests because they give a snapshot of student learning but we need to take care that it is not the only way we measure student learning. We also need to use research papers, projects in science, performances in the arts, math demonstrations and other measures. We must work to solve these problems together in order to save public education. The reality of NCLB is scary, we are afraid of falling behind on the test measurements, but in the meantime are we harming the education of students? These are serious discussions we need to have on all our campuses. We need you, the Board, to be in the forefront of educational reform in our District. Be bold and push for what is right, what is genuine and what is valuable in public education. Our students deserve it.

Thank you.

February 17, 2011

Good Evening,

Thank you for reading the RAA Proclamation. On March 2nd we are asking all the Board Members to sign up to read at sites.

After the last several weeks and several months the tough decisions that the Board has made have made us come together to discuss curriculum instruction and corrective action plans.

The PI Schools have formed committees and they have worked for a couple of weeks. These groups worked hard and long hours to write a plan for their unique schools. The plans the Board is voting on tonight are different than the ones written by the site committees. There are also several components of the plans that must be bargained. Such as: extended day learning, summer institute for teachers and compensation for extra hours needed to monitor student progress and write individual intervention plans. We need to have time to Bargain these items if the Board votes to accept all the plans. It will be difficult to have staff buy in for the plans as written since the plans are not what the teams wrote at their committee meetings.

It is an uphill battle to get out of PI status as a District and we need all staff, teachers and administrators to work together over the next few months. We have many struggles coming up and additional stress due to school closures and moves plus the additional fear of the unknown with the State budget. The teachers of Vista are dedicated, hardworking employees who are passionate about their careers and students. The added outside stresses are going to take a toll on all of us. We must overcome these outside forces to come together as a Unified district.

January 27, 2011

Good Evening Board Members;

I was asked back in early Fall to sit in on the PI Schools DSLT team planning meetings. This process was explained to me as being a collaborative effort to work together to come up with plans to improve student achievement. I personally sat in on four school teams. These team members were dedicated, hard working and critical thinkers. They worked many hours on their plans and pushed hard to think outside their comfort zones.

I think though that you have a real problem on your hands with the plans being submitted today. I have read two of them and except for the Data presented they are carbon copies of each other, not individualized to fit the needs of the individual schools. Please know that there are many items that will be need to be bargained and that I believe the process was a farce. It appeared as if it was a collaborative meeting with input from parents, staff, teachers and admin but in fact it was just window dressing and the Executive Team wrote what they wanted. I am very disappointed with the results and I feel used. The process was not honored and because of the underhanded way it was done you will have little or no buy in from your staffs. It is disheartening that once again the teachers were not listened to. VAVPA's plan had many of the same solutions written in their own words but the way it is written now you would not know that.

I am so upset by what I read that I understand why the teachers feel so angry. Why didn't the Executive team just write the plans and discuss it with the schools instead of pretending to care about their input.

I cannot and will not stand in support of the plans as they are written. It is not what the schools teams wrote and it is so demanding of teachers that I am afraid our District is going to lose more teachers.

I am speaking out tonight about the lack of respect for the school teams. I want you to know that many of the teachers on the teams feel that their input was completely disregarded.

Please carefully examine the plans for yourself and talk to some of the team members.

Thank you.

January 20, 2011

Good Evening Board Members:

I come to you tonight saddened and concerned about our school district. If you look through the newspapers or on the Internet you will know that anytime a school district discusses closing a school it becomes “NEWS”. For parents, students, teachers, and staff a school becomes a part of our lives. It is like an extension of our family. We spend days, months and sometimes multiple years together side-by-side forging relationships and bonds. These bonds are strong and sustain us during the hard times and uplift us and bring us joy. We trust each other and value our time together. Parents entrust us with their most valuable asset, their children.

We would all prefer that no school be closed. The reality is that we have several elementary schools in Vista that are under enrolled. The School Board has set up a committee, the facilities committee, to research and discuss possible options. There has been a process, with all constituents represented, parents, principals, classified employees, district administrators and teachers. The members of this committee have taken their task seriously and worked diligently studying all possible scenarios.

I understand that some people think that the union (VTA) is in charge of the process or making the decision but we only had 3 teachers out of 35 members on the committee. The decision ultimately rests with you, the school Board. I do not envy you the task but I feel that the committee has worked hard to give you the best information possible to make this painful decision.

We must take this opportunity to strengthen our ties as a community; parents, students, teachers and the School Board to strive to be kind to each other, respect each other and work together to make VUSD the best school District for all students. If the state of California fully funded schools then we would not have to close any schools. The financial reality is that we have too many elementary schools with low enrollment. Please take the time to work collaboratively and kindly with one another. Good Evening.

November 18, 2010

Good Evening School Board Members.

I come to you this evening before the beginning of our holiday week thankful for each and every teacher in our school District. Our elementary and middle school teachers have just completed benchmark exams, parent conferences and report cards. Our high school teachers are busy helping seniors prepare their college applications. What an exciting time of year for them. These teachers all generously give their time and counsel to students and parents. I wish them a peaceful and restful Thanksgiving break.

Along with my thanks to our members I must also let this Board know that teachers are frustrated, overwhelmed and stressed by the added burdens they face this year. Our members have lost 7 days of pay, increased class sizes and now an increase in their out of pocket expenses for health benefits. We all know the state of the economy in Vista but each member is feeling it in their own pocket every day. We are expected to do more with less and less.

During hardships groups of people behave in two ways; they band together strengthened by their common needs and goals or they hide out and isolate themselves hoping it will all just go away. The determining factor in which way a group works is the leadership. As the members of VTA vehemently stated last spring we are not confident in the Educational leadership of this District. Dr. Bales has not proven to be an educational leader for the Vista School District.

Since her tenure in Vista we are now a District in Program Improvement, we have seven schools in year 5 Program Improvement, we are under corrective action and we have had major changes in site leadership. The members of VTA are still looking to this Board to make the tough decisions and make Vista once again “No better place to learn”.

Dr. Bales proclaimed at the first Board meeting of this school year that she had been out and visited every school site. Well, I did visit every school site and I met with every principal for at least a ½ an hour during the first two weeks of school. I also visited classrooms and observed teachers. While at one school site Dr. Bales arrived, announced herself to the secretary and before the principal could come out and say hello she had already left the building and returned to her car. This occurred at several sites. This is not visiting each school site, this is not educational leadership, and this is not what we should expect from our superintendent. We deserve a superintendent who visits classrooms, spends time one-on-one with administrators on site learning about their students and their needs.

An effective leader is out front, working with their employees. They are known by each and every member and they let it be known that they are working hard with them during the good and bad times. I would venture to say that few of our teachers have ever seen Dr. Bales on their campus and I would also say some don’t even know what she looks like. She is a phantom to most of our members and students, she is perceived as the opponent instead of the ally we need.

I explain to members all the time that the Board directs only the Superintendent. That is your job. The superintendent is then to go out and make sure that the work of the District gets accomplished. The work of this District is not being accomplished and it is time for the Board to step up and make the changes at the top necessary to improve this District.

We need a leader who can motivate employees to band together, to work hand in hand, to focus the talents and needs of all teachers and administrators to educate the students of Vista. Without this type of leader we are floundering, there is fear, stress and isolation. We need a change and it needs to happen soon. We need this change for all the students in the Vista Unified School District.

I know that most of you are on this School Board to promote public education and because you care about the students in Vista. I don’t doubt your sincerity but I do doubt your commitment to make the tough decisions, the unpopular decisions. It is not easy to be in your position but it is your responsibility as an elected official to make decisions based on what is best for the students. Sometimes that means you must be brave in the face of conflict, steadfast in your convictions of right and wrong and objective in your evaluations. I implore you to be brave and make the tough decision to acquire a true Educational Leader for the Vista School District.

Good Evening.

October 21, 2010

Good Evening Board members.

I come before you this evening nine weeks into the school year.

This beginning of the school year has been more difficult than any in recent history.

We have larger class sizes, early release Wednesday PLCs and tough instructional restrictions.

Our Kindergarten teachers struggled with 34-40 students, insufficient materials and a lack of books for all students for many weeks into the school year. Today we still have classes without enough books or materials for all students.

We moved students 4-5 weeks into the school year. This is very difficult for students to deal with; they have made friends and bonded with their teachers. We can and should do better for our students, families and employees. I urge you to look into these issues now so we can solve them and not repeat them next year.

Our kindergarten teachers have struggled with large class sizes, and now they must administer the common assessments to each student individually. After completing the assessment they must then bubble in the results. If you have not witnessed this task I urge to go visit schools during the next few weeks so you can see for yourself how difficult and time consuming it is.

With all these changes and additional stress on Interventions, ELD instruction and meeting the State and NCLB requirements many of our members are feeling the pressure. When we discover that due to all these changes mistakes were made in schedules for daily minutes; we are concerned that too much has occurred too quickly to be accurate. There are times to move quickly and try new techniques and strategies but at other times we need to take the time to evaluate, re-think and re-organize so that what occurs in the classroom is necessary, thoughtful and efficient.

We are all feeling the pressure throughout the District; teachers, nurses, counselors, office staff, custodians, administrators and even you the School Board. These are tough economic times in our state and nation but we have an obligation to be the best despite the circumstances. Our students deserve a quality, integrated and inclusive education. We need to work together to solve these problems, to ease the stress and to plan and cooperate. Too often teachers are told at the last minute about a new curriculum or program and not enough time is given to learn the new material before they are expected to use it with students.

I will give you two examples from the last two weeks:

Teachers were given 4 days to prepare for the new curriculum for the intervention program. These dedicated teachers came in over their weekend and worked 10-12 hours prepping, learning the curriculum and rearranging schedules so they could be ready for their students Monday.

My other example is the use of ABI for K-5 report cards. A few teachers at each site were given instruction in how to use the program and then went back to their sites to train their colleagues. For one hour! From personal experience I know that using ABI for grades is a good idea and it works. I also know that it takes time to learn and can be frustrating at first. Teachers are concerned that they will not have enough time for parent conferences and now with the new report card program there is a time crunch.

You see parent conference days last year were minimum days that gave the teachers one more hour for scheduling conferences than we are getting this year. Teachers have less time, more students and a new grading program. Wouldn’t you be worried?

I hope we can change the schedule before parent conferences. This would be a great relief for our K-5 teachers.

On a lighter note this Saturday, October 23rd is the Art Festival and many of our students, teachers, and parents will be there. I hope you all will take some time to come and see the amazing work our students produce. It is truly exciting to see the art and hear the music our students can make even as we cut the visual and performing arts programs. The times to celebrate our successes should be savored.

Thank you.

September 9, 2010

Good Evening Dr. Bales and Board Members

This evening I wanted to talk about several issues of concern for our members. We are excited that this year we are over our projected enrollment. It has been several years since we have had more students enrolled then we expected. This is good news for the school sites and the District.

On the other hand, it makes for a very disruptive beginning of the school year. I have had many teachers contact me about the number of students in their classes. I have kindergarten teachers with 41, that is correct 41, students in a class that should not have more than 32 students. Try to remember what it was like when you were in elementary school, the fear, the newness, the trepidation of entering a strange environment. Add to that memory, the realization that you are one of 41, how can you get the teacher’s attention? She/he wants to make sure your first days of school are exciting and to make sure you want to come again.

The students’ experience is not the best under these circumstances and the teacher feels overwhelmed. This is not the scenario we want for our first time students. We also have students entering classes today or tomorrow who will then be moved to another school site because there is no room at their home school. The teacher must furnish, out of their own pocket, supplies for the new student and then the student meets everyone only to be moved to another school.

There is no easy answer, I know, but we must strive to do better for our students, families and teachers. We need to make the beginning of the school year run more efficiently. How can we accomplish this? It is by collaborating and talking to each other and looking at trends and history. We should learn from our mistakes and not keep repeating them. The changes are in place to make our classes meet the contracted numbers by tomorrow and I appreciate the hard work put in by the District administration but we can and should do better.

My next area of concern is about middle school sports. The Budget Advisory Committee last year recommended and the Board approved eliminating middle school sports. We also know that one hook to keep students involved and excited about school is their participation in team sports in school. We foster this love of sports and school in middle school. Our middle school coaches have worked many hours over and above their contract to try and come up with a way to save sports for our students. This was not easy but they were all willing to put in the time and effort for the students. We have now heard today that the District will not be offering school sports but will have an independent agency run sports for middle school students. This undermines the work our long time coaches have invested in the planning of team sports. We understand that not all students can voluntarily contribute money for sports but we were hoping to offer it and see how much we needed to raise for all students to participate. It is better for our students to have the opportunity at their school site then at a neutral venue. We need to foster team spirit and a sense of belonging. I hope we can look over this option again and try to use our experienced coaches to work with our students.

On a final note; I was privileged to be a part of the ribbon cutting ceremony for our newest high school, Mission Vista High School. The student guides were knowledgeable and excited to show off their campus. The ceremony was well planned and executed, each member of their staff was proud of the campus and their promise for the future. I look forward to attending their art and music performances and I know they will be an asset to the Vista School programs. Thank you for your time this evening.

August 19, 2010

Good Evening Dr. Bales and Board Members

I am speaking tonight for the first time as the new VTA President. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge how proud and honored I am to have served as Jan O’ Reilly’s Vice-President for the past five years. Jan worked hard as an advocate for the students and teachers of this District. It will not be easy to fill her shoes in this position. Jan spoke at every Board meeting about the need to come together as a community and make Vista the best District possible.

The role of the Vista Teachers Association is to advocate for the needs of the teachers, librarians, counselors, psychologists, and nurses of our District. In a collaborative atmosphere this means we are partners with Site Administrators, District Administrators and of course the governing body you, the School Board. At times we are at odds with each other and it would seem that we are adversaries instead of partners in educating the children of Vista. But as we begin this new school year we have an opportunity to work together and strengthen our partnerships.

As educators every member of VTA has the best interests of our students at heart. We are in the classrooms, at Back to School Nights, sporting events, plays, concerts and orientation. A teacher wrote to me this week that she came in two days last week to prepare her classroom for kindergarten orientation, and then spent 6:00- 8:30 Thursday night greeting parents and students. This was all done on her own time and without compensation. She did this because she cares about the students in her classroom and understands the fears of parents sending their child off to their first year of school. I hear stories like this every day from teachers, principals and parents.

Another teacher was working in her classroom, decorating walls, moving tables and chairs, planning lessons and making copies. She stopped by the office and began talking to a student who had come to register for school. This student had her two younger brothers with her and needed to take them to their elementary school to register. The children were walking and the elementary school was at least 3 miles away. This teacher stopped the work in their classroom and took the three children to the school to register, found out they were at the wrong school, accompanied them to the correct school and gave them a ride home. These stories are just some of the ways that our teachers go over and above the requirements of their jobs.

As we begin this new school year, with many of the issues that consumed us last year resolved; such as a contract after three long years, we can move forward and work together to make this year the best in Vista for students. We are not in a good place financially and neither is the state of California. We have financial and educational issues that will not be easily overcome. We have the consequences of the harsh educational mandate of No Child Left Behind. The punitive nature of this Act has hurt students and school Districts across the country.

The accountability and harsh realities of NCLB have made schools eliminate or shorten the time students spend in art, social studies, music and PE. We need to fight against this trend and make sure that our students receive a well-rounded education. Of course we want all students to succeed and become life long learners with a thirst for knowledge and a love of school.

A new school year is a time of hope, high expectations and joy. Students are excited about coming to school to see old friends, teachers are excited about their new students and administrators are eager to get the year started smoothly. We are opening our new high school this year after many delays and controversies. Now is the time to celebrate the opening of our first new High school since Rancho opened in 1987. Mission Vista High is a Dual magnet High school with the arts and technology as their key components. I wish them all the best as they open their doors for students. The success and need for a high school for the arts and technology is an important point for our District to remember as we move forward; we must strive to make each school in our District a place of art, music and technology.

Thank you for your time this evening and I look forward to seeing you all out at our schools celebrating the successes of Vista students and Teachers.