

LOS ALAMITOS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

Great Achievements, Great Needs

• Los Alamitos Unified honors volunteers, shares excellence, and highlights urgent need to modernize high school in annual State of the District community presentation.

Residents of Los Alamitos, Rossmoor and Seal Beach recently heard about the major achievements of the Los Alamitos Unified School District and the challenges that lie ahead for the system of nearly 10,000 students in nine schools.

Speaking to a State of the District breakfast crowd of more than 270, District Superintendent Dr. Sherry Kropp highlighted the people and programs that have resulted in the district being consistently ranked in the top two in Orange County for 20 years.

She began by honoring the district's Heroes of the Heart, "special people who go above and beyond to make Los Alamitos Unified a great place for students to learn, grow, and thrive." The volunteers represented all schools and the district itself and for many years have helped students in ways ranging from being room parents, to leading the PTA, to organizing fund raising to benefit the entire district.

Those honored include: Trista Guetig, Hopkinson; Anne Vida, Los Alamitos High School; Maria Barcelo, Lee Elementary; Barbara Ringhofer and Rachel DeMarco, McAuliffe Middle School; Courtney Gustin, McGaugh Elementary; Jamie Tubbs, Oak Middle School; Jeremy Overstreet, Rossmoor Elementary; Brian Leibl and Dave Locke, Los Alamitos Unified.

Kropp singled out two Heroes for special recognition. Ben Penick, a Weaver Elementary volunteer who was recently diagnosed with ALS, "has become even more of a hero by inspiring students to seek ways to help those in need and how they can make a difference in others' lives," Kropp said. The school's Ambassadors program is supporting groups like the Guardian Angels, who assist those dealing with the impact of ALS.

Kimberly Steward was a district employee and a highly active volunteer at Los Alamitos Elementary until her sudden death in June. "Words can't describe the influence Kim had on the LAE community. We miss her," Kropp said. Steward's husband Dave accepted the honor on her behalf.

Kropp then highlighted the "national caliber results" the district has posted and credited highly skilled teachers and staff, ongoing professional training, targeted intervention for students in need, and a culture of innovation across the district.

In addition to stellar scores on state assessments, Kropp noted some key statistics:

- 76 percent of Los Alamitos High graduates completed University of California admission requirements this year, up 8 percentage points since 2011. "Students who complete the entrance requirements while in high school," Kropp said, "are twice as likely to graduate from college."

- 65% LAHS graduates have taken at least one Advanced Placement course, an indication of the importance the district places on all students having access to the courses that lead to college, Kropp said.
- 71% of LAHS students are connected to at least one extracurricular activity, club, or service group. Students who are connected to school have better attendance, better grades, are happier, and are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education.

Kropp also pointed out that every school in the district has been designated as California Distinguished School and a Gold Ribbon school. Athletic teams have accumulated more than 280 Sunset League championships and more than 20 CIF championships. And arts programs also won honors and championships as well, including the Los Alamitos High show choirs that have been national champs for eight consecutive years.

As strong as these achievements are, Kropp said the district is committed to doing better. “We believe that 100% of our students can be proficient, connected to school and the community, and complete college entrance requirements,” she said.

While the community celebrates the schools’ great achievements, Kropp said, it is important to recognize great needs ahead, especially at Los Alamitos High. While all of the other district schools have been modernized, the high school has not. It is 50 years old, Kropp said, and in dire need of:

- new electrical and other utility infrastructure
- a new building for science classrooms and labs
- modernized classrooms
- a performing arts center that can handle the rising demand for shows and seats
- a new gym that can accommodate the vast schedule of practices and games for both boys and girls

In addition, up to 31 aging portables need to be removed. The district tried to sell a few that need to be removed right now, but they were in such deteriorated condition, Kropp said, “that no one would buy them even for \$1.”

While the district is setting aside funds to maintain the schools that already have been modernized, there is no way to set aside enough for what needs to be done at the high school, Kropp said.

After three years of studying the issue, the school board decided to put a \$97-million bond — Measure G — on the November ballot. It would be paid back through approximately \$30 per \$100,000 of assessed value—not market value—for each home.

The bond issue meets the accountability conditions of the OC Tax Payer’s Association, Kropp said, and would be governed by a Citizens Oversight Committee to ensure funds are spent only on projects on the voter approved list. Community members Brian Leibl and Dave Locke are co-chairs of the Yes on G, Residents for Excellent Schools committee and spoke about the need for voters to support the bond.

Kropp emphasized that the goal of the bond is to create facilities to serve the needs of existing students, not to increase enrollment. Enrollment of new interdistrict transfer students is down 295 at elementary and middle schools in the last eight years and down 80 at the high school this year alone.

The district has continued making progress on its 2012 commitment to improve safety at district schools each year, said school board President Dr. Jeffrey Barke, and has been recognized by the Orange County Sheriff as a model for enhancing safety.

All schools, except Los Alamitos High, have security fencing and locked entry gates, Barke said. He said other safety enhancements include:

- Classroom windows have been coated with shatterproof film
- room numbers have been painted on buildings and roofs to aid responders
- staffs have received active shooter procedure trainings
- More campus supervisors hired
- A district wide Lockdown notification system installed
- Space set aside for use of law enforcement officers at all sites to increase their presence on campuses
- A “blue light” phone tower prototype, like those common on college campuses, will be installed at Los Alamitos High

Barke said improving physical security campuses is only one way the district is making schools safer for students. Other measures include the availability of more mental health therapists, available, celebrating P.E.A.C.E. Week at all schools to advocate tolerance and inclusion, CPR/first aid/defibrillator training, random drug testing, Red Ribbon week and the Every 15 Minutes campaign against impaired driving.

The State of the District event at the Navy Golf Club in Cypress was hosted by the Los Alamitos Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization that raises funds to support local schools. The group runs a popular program of K-12 summer enrichment classes. It also recently donated \$90,000 to support science, technology and arts at the district’s schools and began offering free world language classes for all second-graders.

The event was underwritten by donations from corporate sponsors, including the Title Sponsor Alamitos Eye Care, along with BNSF Railway, Southland Credit Union, National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning, Pacific West Energy Solutions, RS Crum Inc., and Sean Payne Certified Financial Planner.



Superintendent Dr. Sherry Kropp reviews district academic progress.



Los Alamitos Unified honored its 2018 Heroes of the Heart volunteers. From left PTA Council President Janet Murphy, Superintendent Kropp, Hero Barb Ringhofer, Dave Steward accepting on behalf of Hero Kimberly Steward, Hero Anne Vida, Hero Rachel DeMarco, Tiffany Penick accepting on behalf of Hero Ben Penick, Senator Janet Nguyen, hero Brian Leibl, Hero Maria Barcelo, Hero Jeremy Overstreet, Hero Courtney Gustin, Hero Trista Guetig, Hero Jamie Tubbs, Hero Dave Locke, Board members Karen Russell, Meg Cutuli, and Jeffrey Barke.

Article and photos by Robert Ostmann, Los Alamitos Unified School District

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